

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

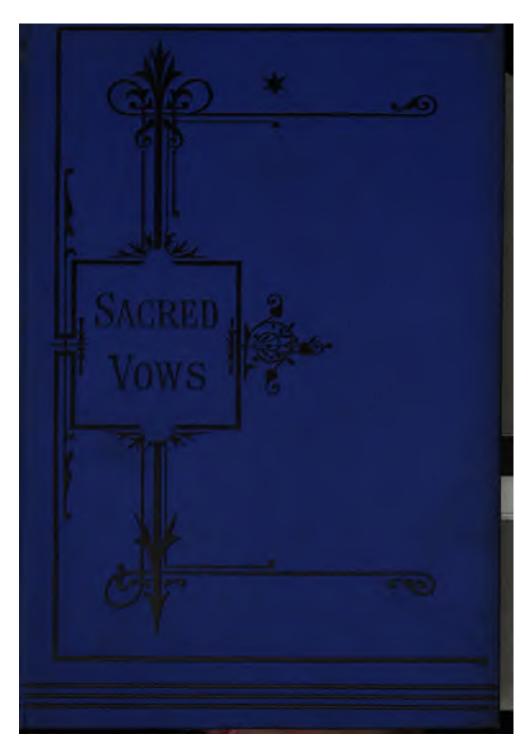
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + Refrain from automated querying Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/





•

REMINGTONS NEW BOOKS, AT ALL LIBRARIES.

GADDINGS WITH A PRIMITIVE PEOPLE.—By

W. A. BAILLIE GROHMAN, Author of "The Tyrol and the Tyrolese." 2 vols., 21/. "Tyrol and the Tyrolese" is a book of quite unusual charm."—Spectator.

A BRITON ABROAD.—By the Author of "Two Years Abaft the Mast." I vol., 7/6.

MADE DURING A VISIT IN 1876-7.—By Selwyn Eyre. 1 vol., 7/6.

REMINGTON & CO., 5, Arundel Street, Strand, W.C.

SACRED VOWS.

BY

E WERNER.

AUTHOR OF

"SUCCESS AND HOW HE WON IT," "UNDER A CHARM,"
"RIVEN BONDS," ETC.

TRANSLATED BY BERTHA NESS.

IN THREE VOLS.

VOL. II.



London:
REMINGTON AND CO.,

5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1878.

[All Rights Reserved].

251. f. 112.





SACRED VOWS.

CHAPTER I.

One of the great Catholic Church festivals was being celebrated in the monastery, and as usual on such occasions, the magnificent large chapel became the centre and gathering place for all the devout people of the neighbourhood.

The church's spacious aisles were barely able to accommodate the flocking crowds, and were densely packed. The Prelate, assisted by all the clergy of his monastery,

VOL. II. B

performed high mass himself to-day with all the churchly pomp and brilliancy suited to such an important feast-day. From without, the bright sunshine fell through the high arched windows, and the magnificent glass paintings shed purple and deep blue reflections upon the marble floor. Music swelled in full powerful chords from the choir and voices soared to the vaulted roof, while through it all could rustling of rich heard the silken banners; in the background the high altar glistened, illumined by a hundred wax lights. enveloped in clouds of incense, surmounted by a picture of the Crucifixion, and surrounded by a crowd of priests—an unapproachable, consecrated sanctuary.

Standing upon its steps, the Prelate celebrated the holy office. This was indeed the place where his influence was displayed to the fullest extent; something elevated lay in the proud, solemn dignity with which he performed all the prescribed ceremonies. Now he raised the host, and upon their knees fell high and low, bending their heads humbly to the ground; only the priests remained erect, and looked down upon the prostrate crowd, bowing before the Holiest of Holies, although almost seeming as if bowing to them alone.

Immediately beside the Prelate stood Benedict; he, too, did not wear the black garb of the Order to-day, but was, like all the rest, in full priestly vestments. The costly robes, richly embroidered and interwoven with gold, added greatly and effectively to his appearance, which lost nothing by the pallor of his features, as they shone forth beneath his dark, curly hair. Many an eye amongst those of the devout worshippers hung upon the young priest; many a glance fastened itself admiringly upon him, but he gazed coldly and impassively upon the crowd. The ceremony in which he, too, took part appeared alone to occupy him.

And yet his thoughts were far away from the high mass and consecrated building; they sought a distant, quiet, lonely wood. Still denser rose the incense from the altar, still louder swelled the music from the choir, but amidst all these exultant tones re-echoed the soft, dream-like rippling of a brook. Out of clouds of incense peeped forth a rosy, childish face with long brown curls, and a pair of large blue eyes, looking tearfully and alarmedly at him. The priest's lips quivered; he wrenched himself away from these pictures which surrounded him day and night, which now even would not leave him at peace before the altar; was he not a monk, and were not these pictures a sin!

The other priests appeared to be less conscientious as regarded the sanctity of the time and place; long use had blunted their feelings. It is true they preserved all outward decorum, but as the music, recommencing its fullest tones overpowered any softer sounds, and the ceremonies now taking place did not demand their attention so exclusively, many a lip moved, and low, almost inaudible remarks passed to and fro amongst them. These most reverend gentlemen had long become accustomed to this style

of conversation, of which of course those in the church perceived nothing.

"Benedict looks splendid to-day!" whispered Pater Eusebius to the Prior standing by his side. "In his simple black robe one would never believe that he could look thus. His appearance does credit to the whole monastery!"

"He would do more credit to a uniform!" replied the Prior, spitefully, but in an equally subdued voice, while his glance flew across to the *prie-dieu* chairs of the Rhanecks, where the son's epaulettes glittered next to those of the father.

"Why not, indeed!" murmured Eusebius.

"And see, too, how Count Rhaneck looks at him; it seems to me that he sees nothing of the sacred service save that one figure! But

the Count's face is singularly grave and sombre to-day; don't you think so?"

The same repulsive smile quivered again upon the Prior's lips, as at the same time he bowed low, and folded his hands in the orthodox manner.

- "His lordship, the Count, would perhaps prefer to have Pater Benedict as his heir on his right hand, and to see Count Ottfried at the altar instead!"
- "Folly!" whispered Eusebius, copying the Prior's manner. "Do you then believe certain dark reports?"
- "I only believe my own eyes, and they see pretty sharply. Beware, too, lest such reports reach Benedict's ears; he is overbearing enough already, and if—"

The Prelate's loud, full-toned voice in-

terrupted him; he spoke the blessing. Both priests became silent; death-like stillness reigned in the whole assembly.

High mass was over, the crowd pushed towards the church doors, and the more distinguished hearers and spectators rose from their seats, while the Prelate retired with all his clergy. In the equally empty sacristy, Benedict leaned against the window; he still wore his priestly robe, and did not appear to think of laying it aside. Supporting his head on his hand, he looked out into the sunny world away towards the mountains rising distantly in all their majesty; a side door was opened, and the Prior entered.

"What, Pater Benedict, still in your vestments?" asked he, sharply. "The mass has long been ended; why do you not take off your robes?"

"I had forgotten them. I will immediately—"

Benedict moved as if to retire, but the Prior withheld him—

- "You sought an interview with the Prelate just now?"
 - "Yes!"
- "And to-day, too, when all are so much occupied? Your need seems to be very urgent."
- "Does it interest your Reverence?" asked the young priest, quietly.

The Prior looked down at Benedict with all the haughty arrogance of a superior—

"You seem to forget that I am the mediator between the Abbot and clergy of the

monastery," said he, severely. "It is most unseemly that any one should overlook me, and appeal personally to his Grace."

"I did not look upon the rule as a command!" explained Benedict, composedly; "nor does the Prelate seem to take that view either, as he immediately granted my request. Your Reverence need not be concerned about the audience; it merely touches my private affairs, and not any others."

The tone of the last words was so peculiar that the Prior's attention was aroused.

"What do you mean by that?" asked he, still more sternly; but a quick, scrutinising glance was cast over the young monk's features.

"I mean monastical affairs; for instance, information about the deficiency of a portion

of the conventual money, which the Prelate wishes for urgently, and cannot obtain because the collector of rents has kept his books in an irregular, negligent manner."

Sudden pallor suffused the Prior's face; his piercing eyes were fixed watchfully on Benedict.

- "And are you, perhaps, able to give him this information?"
- "Not the information itself, but certainly a hint as to where it might be procured. Your Reverence may recollect that shortly before the collector's dismissal, he suddenly became seriously ill. You, the sole adviser of his conscience, were just then absent, and I was called to confess him."

The pallor on the Prior's face had become more livid.

"Oh, indeed! He confessed to you?"

"He named no one!" said Benedict, coldly. "The man was schooled too well, and I would not press the dangerously sick man with over many questions; his state of health was too alarming. But on that occasion I received the impression that the collector was merely a tool in another's hands, and that the deficient sums were not misappropriated for his own benefit. I am convinced that if the Prelate were to bring the whole weight of his personal influence to bear upon him, it would not be so difficult to obtain a circumstantial confession."

"You have then, indeed, made weighty discoveries?"

The Prior did not succeed in meeting his young subordinate's eye, which rested firmly

and menacingly upon him. His voice sounded hoarse, as he added hastily—

"I only regret that you did not immediately inform the Prelate of it; the affair happened some weeks since."

"Had it not been so repugnant to me to play the part of an informer, I should have done so; I resolved to let the matter rest when I saw that the injury could not be made good, and that the Abbot's future energetic supervision would render the convent's property safe from any such attacks. The subject would not have been alluded to to-day either, did I not find myself forced to beg that your Reverence would cease all the petty annoyances and endless persecutions, of which I have been the object during the whole period of my presence here,

and for which you misuse your power as my superior. They are certainly only pricks with a needle, but with such needle-pricks people may be tortured to death, and I have now arrived at a point when I can endure them no longer. I beg you to spare me; there are many in the monastery who have more to answer for than I."

Had Benedict been rather less proud and contemptuous towards mankind, he would have understood the look which flashed upon him in deadly venomous hatred. In that look lay his ruin, but the young priest turned contemptuously away and retired to exchange his vestments for his everyday gown. He surely had no suspicion of how boundlessly imprudently he had acted, and of the enemy he had irritated.

The Prior gazed silently after him for a few moments.

"You dare to threaten me? That weak-minded collector must have opened his eyes; I will take care that he does not betray still more. Beware Pater Benedict! Up to the present time you were merely disagreeable, but now you commence to be dangerous; it is time to put you aside!"

The great convent dinner, furnished with every luxury and magnificence, which succeeded High Mass, was over. The monastery loved on such days to display all the brilliancy of its riches, and to exercise a veritably extravagant hospitality towards both high and low. Now the repast was ended, most of the guests had already departed, and the

Prelate had also retired, as the much simpler afternoon service was performed by sub-ordinate clergy.

At the appointed hour, Benedict entered the Abbot's dwelling; however, the servant did not conduct him into the apartments, but ushered him into the garden, where the Prelate was enjoying the fresh air after the The tall figure day's many exertions. wandered slowly up and down; the diamonds of the great cross, which he wore on his breast, flashed upon his black robe, while a velvet cap of the same sombre hue, covered tonsure and his grizzled but still abundant hair. The spacious, richly-cultivated convent garden, with its park-like grounds, was laid out in equally magnificent style as the monastery itself, which would not have disgraced a royal castle. There were, indeed, few castles in the country which could compete with it, and there lay something of almost regal self-consciousness in the Prelate's bearing. The former Count Rhaneck had certainly chosen no abasement when he dedicated his life to the Church; even the honours and position of his brother, the present owner of the entail, did not attain to the absolute power and sovereign importance of the Abbot, who felt himself to be an autocratic lord and ruler over the ground upon which he stood.

Not every one is so sensitive to impressions as the Prelate appeared to be at this moment. At least, Benedict did not seem to be so, although it was the power and glory of such a position which had from his youth been

VOL. II.

pointed out to him as the aim and end of his career. Was the time then already past when ambition and enthusiasm made this goal appear desirable to him—he looked as coldly and unemotionally upon the proud surroundings and upon his Abbot as this morning upon the crowd, which sank on its knees before him entreating his blessing.

The Prelate seemed very gracious to-day; he beckoned the young monk, standing before him in respectful attitude, to come to his side, and continued walking slowly by him.

"You desired an interview with me, Pater Benedict. Have you any request to prefer? I am ready to hear you!"

"I have a petition to offer to your Grace!"

The Prelate looked up slightly astonished;
it was the first time that a petition had come

from those lips, which had ever only parted for the most necessary replies, and otherwise were silent in mute obedience.

- "Well, say on!"
- "Vicar Clemens was here a few weeks since, to beg for temporary assistance in his parish, which from his increasing years and sickness he cannot serve alone any longer. Nothing as yet is arranged as to who is to render the aid promised—"
 - "No! I reserved the decision for myself!"
- "Then I beg to have the duty assigned to me."

The Prelate suddenly stopped.

"To you? Why? For what reason?"

Benedict looked down; he could not prevent the bright colour rushing to his face beneath those searching eyes. "I—I long for activity. Life in the convent offers me but little opportunity for it, because as junior, I am shut out from most of the priestly offices, and the monastic rules leave me so much leisure—"

"Which you know well how to employ," interrupted the Prelate. "Study occupies you day and night. Have you suddenly lost all taste for it?"

Benedict made no reply, but the colour still burned on his brow. He could and dared not give the reason which bade him fly from the monastery and its neighbourhood; he only felt that he must go, go at any price.

"It is the most wretched of all our parishes," continued the Prelate. "There you would be high up in the mountains, shut off

from the world and mankind, for all intercourse you would be dependent upon a poverty-stricken village; you would have to sacrifice all society, all comfort to which you are accustomed in the monastery. Vicar Clemens is badly endowed, he can hardly offer you the barest necessaries."

"I am young, and not effeminate; besides, for the present it is merely assistance during a few months, just before the commencement of a rougher time of year," said the young priest in a low tone.

"Strange!" The Prelate's glance still scrutinised his features. "I purposed utilising the appointment as a species of punishment, should any be needed, and certainly did not think that one of my clergy would beg for it. I will consider the matter!"

Benedict bowed silently; as he received no sign of dismissal, he remained at the Prelate's side, and without speaking, both continued their walk for some minutes longer. Yet the young monk apparently still had something on his mind, he was evidently struggling with himself, and at last began—

- "Your Grace!"
- "Do you wish anything more?"
- "Ignatius Lank's wife was with me this morning. Her husband is dying, and longs to receive the Holy Sacrament; the poor woman begged and prayed in agony for an exception to be made just this once."
- "You of course refused with all severity?" asked the Prelate frigidly. "You know the man is an apostate, he was one of the first to join in a movement which is directed against us."

- "Ignatius Lank is the steadiest peasant in the neighbourhood"—suppressed emotion trembled in the speaker's voice—" he has ever shown respect to the monastery, and only lately saved Pater Eusebius' life when he was in danger of drowning."
 - "Has he been converted?"
 - "No!"
- "Then refuse him the sacraments, and if he should die, refuse him the blessing and funeral offices also."
 - "Your Grace!"
 - "Pater Benedict, obey and be silent!"

Benedict was indeed silent, but his hand clutched his robe convulsively; this action did not escape the Prelate's eye.

"How does it happen," began he again, "that in all such occurrences people always

address themselves to you? Why not to Pater Eusebius, why not to the other priests, none of whom are so moody and inaccessible for the people as you?"

"Perhaps because in despite of all, they feel that I am the only one here who owns a heart!"

The incautious word was out. From the Prior and every other monk Benedict would have drawn the sharpest censure upon himself; the Prelate looked composedly at him, but there lay something worse in the tone of his reply than mere censure.

"Beware of your heart, and I might add of your head too! The first is not needed here, and the second only when it is required in the service of the Church. Do not forget that you vowed implicit obedience to her, and teach your head and heart in time to bend to this vow before you are compelled to do so."

Benedict answered nothing, and what indeed could he have said! But the Prelate suddenly changed this subject of conversation.

- "As regards Vicar Clemens' affair, I have already thought it over, and am disposed to grant your desire. You may give him the wished-for assistance; prepare to start for the mountains the day after to-morrow."
- "I thank your Grace!" The young priest was about to retire, when the Prelate suddenly stepped close before him.
- "For the present I am letting you leave my supervision and also that of the monastery. You know the hopes which my brother, and

I too, place upon your future, you are the youngest, by far the most important power in the convent. I should not wish that we might lose it. Pater Benedict!"—he laid his hand heavily on the latter's shoulder, and looked steadily into his eyes—"yonder before the altar you have vowed yourself, body and soul, to the Church, the oath binds you for time and for eternity. Remember that, when temptation draws near to you. I let you go, because I know that you are capable of everything, save perjury!"

Benedict had become deadly pale, but he did not flinch beneath the Prelate's gaze. It was seldom that the Abbot praised any one, still more seldom that he spoke in such a solemn tone of admonition; the proud priest usually contented himself with distributing:

commands or punishing misdemeanours, to warnings he never condescended. The young priest felt that, notwithstanding the sternness of the threat, it meant more than the most affable condescension towards others; there was something in it of the manner in which one of equal birth would be addressed.

"I know what I have vowed," said he, in a hollow voice, "and what I have to keep!"

"It is well!" The Prelate returned to his ordinary tone. "I expect the Prior, and will inform him of your altered destination. Go now and be ready for the journey the day after to-morrow."

Benedict had not left the garden many moments before the Prior entered and approached his superior with much greater humility and submissiveness than befitted his position. The same watchful expression still stood on his face; he might well fear that in the audience certain other matters should have been discussed, but his anxiety soon disappeared. The Prelate was very gracious to him, spoke of several events of the day, received reports on various subjects, and at last said, as if casually—

- "One thing more! Pater Benedict will leave us in a day or so; he goes into the mountains, in order, at his own desire, to give Vicar Clemens the assistance he has asked for in his parish."
- "At his own desire?" Astonishment made the Prior repeat the words.
- "You are surprised? I was equally so, the post is not one such as most persons would care for! Have you any suspicion as

to what can be the cause of this singular request?"

"Not the slightest! Unless it were—"
the Prior could not possibly let the opportunity pass of dealing a blow to the man
he hated behind his back, "unless it were
that the strict rules of the monastery are irksome to him, and that he longs for greater
liberty."

The Prelate shook his head. "It is not that. The flame on his brow did not arise from that source. Have you noticed that he has become more intimate with any one lately, that he associates with any family in the neighbourhood, perhaps come into contact with any women?"

"No, certainly not. In his walks he seeks solitude most diligently, and never crosses a

strange threshold unless he be wanted in his priest's capacity."

"I may be mistaken," said the Prelate, thoughtfully. "Possibly he wishes to impose some new sort of penance upon himself; that appointment calls for abnegation sufficient."

"Pater Benedict's craving for penance has long ceased!" interposed the Prior, maliciously. "For some weeks he has entirely given up all exercises of penitence and prayer, which he formerly practised so freely. They suddenly came to an end."

"He has doubtless seen their inefficacy!" said the Prelate, coolly, "and he is right. I blame that least of all. Have you no other complaint against him?"

The Prior hesitated, he would gladly have aired his hatred, but he knew too well that

he should have to prove every word. The Prelate was not a man to believe blindly, without examination.

- "No!" said he, at last.
- "Then the matter may rest for the present. Inform the Vicar in the meanwhile."
- "Most reverend father," began the Prior again, with fawning humility. "It certainly does not become me to offer advice, when your reverence has already decided, but this appointment—without wishing to interfere with Pater Benedict—I still doubt what reliance may be placed upon him."
- "I have long doubted it!" said the Prelate, coldly, "and that is why he shall go away. Here in the convent he guards every look and word most carefully, because he knows that every action is watched; here nothing

can be discovered from that reserve. We will now try freedom, perhaps there he will show more readily what is in him. Of course all provisions as to the necessary supervision will be made. You have reliable people at that place."

"The schoolmaster, upon whom I can depend in every respect. He certainly could not report much about the old, weak minded Vicar; as regards Pater Benedict, I will answer for it, that not one idea of what he does, or leaves undone, will be hidden from us."

"It is well. Instruct the man accurately, I will receive his reports personally. Should Benedict misuse his liberty, I shall take him back into severe training."

"If it be not then too late!" the Prior

hazarded. "The neighbouring monastery made an unfortunate experience in that respect with one of its young monks, who was assisted by a similar appointment to secret flight from the Order."

- "The neighbouring monastery owes that experience to its lax *régime* and its Prelate's weakness. I keep my monks better curbed!"
 - "But, Benedict-"
- "Most reverend Prior," interrupted the Abbot, with haughty, almost contemptuous, arrogance, "will you be so good as trust the wisdom of my measures. It is exactly with Benedict that I can venture upon it, because he possesses something that you are certainly always used to place in the background, but that in such experiments weighs heavily in the balance—a conscience.

To him vows and oaths are not empty words, as to so many others. He is still enthusiast enough to feel their whole weight. He may ruin himself when it comes to extremities, or deliver himself into our hands in open defiance; but in secret flight he will never turn his back upon us. I know him too well to fear that."

The Prior bowed submissively. He gulped down the bitter pill, which the Prelate gave him to taste in the word "conscience." Upon the whole it was to his advantage that Benedict should be sent away for a time. He had raised the opposition more for form's sake.

The young priest stood in his chamber, and gazed in the direction where the roof of Dobra Castle rose above the trees' leafy

crown. Did he really impose a penance upon himself in the hastily-formed resolution. The Prior was right; he had long ceased from his former acts of penitence and his prayers. He had only been able by stern necessity to deafen his head with them; but when once his heart began to stir he perceived that they "were inefficacious."

Since the day when, lying by the edge of the brook, he had seen that rosy little fairylike figure for the first time, the struggle had quite changed its character; certainly it had not become easier, and now he must tear himself away from it with one mighty wrench.

Benedict put the knife firmly to the wound; let it quiver and bleed, it did not matter so long as he removed the sting.

Up in the mountains he would be safe from

a renewed encounter, and from the dangerous, dreamy poetry of the wood's solitude; safe from those dreams, too, it was to be hoped, from which he had ever sought in vain for rescue at the steps of the altar. As that could protect him no longer—now nothing was left, but to save himself.





CHAPTER II.

"And I tell you something has happened to the child. If she deny it ten times over to me, if you shrug your shoulders ever so scornfully, I adhere to it."

With this sentence, evidently the conclusion to a longer speech, Fräulein Reich sat down, cast a challenging look at Günther, who stood opposite to her, and took up her needlework again with such eagerness as though it were necessary to make up with all haste for the time lost in talking.

Günther did indeed look on somewhat scoffingly, and he shrugged his shoulders, too, as he replied"But, my dear Fräulein, why this long harangue, and this warmth, in order to prove that Lucie is beginning to become sensible at last?"

"Sensible?" Now it was Franziska's turn to shrug her shoulders. "She is unhappy. Ever since that day on which she returned with tear-stained eyes from the wood, her old light-heartedness has ceased. Something has happened, I wager my head upon it, that something occurred; but I cannot discover what it is. The chatterbox, who at other times cannot be silent for ten minutes about the veriest trifle, meets all my questions and enquiries with an obstinate reserve, for which I should never have given her credit."

The scoffing expression vanished out of

Günther's countenance, and gave place to anxiety.

- "If only Count Rhaneck is not at the bottom of it!" said he seriously.
- "Why that, indeed! She does not care so much for him!" Franziska snapped her fingers.
- "On the contrary. I found on the evening of the *fête* that she cared only too much about him; and even my prohibition, strictly as I issued it, seems not to have made too deep an impression. She defied me quite openly the following day."
- "But if I tell you that she takes no farther interest now in the Count," persisted Franziska; "that she studiously avoids him! Indeed it is not his doing, as he wanders constantly around Dobra with his gun and game-

bag, and appears first here, then there. Fortunately, we know what sport the young gentleman is after, and make our arrangements accordingly. May his patron saint have mercy upon him if he fall into my hands. I would take him to task, until any inclination to come again should fade away altogether! But he has the sense to avoid coming near me; I can hardly ever see him from a distance."

"Are you sure that Lucie has not spoken to him?"

Franziska raised her head with great selfconsciousness.

"Herr Günther, you confided your sister into my hands, and therefore I should have thought that such questions were surely superfluous. Since the day when she went

into the wood without permission, Lucie has not left my side. I have watched her since the disclosure you made to me, like—like—"

- "Like a Cerberus!" added Günther.
- "That is a most flattering description of my person!" cried Fräulein Reich, rising, much offended. "So that is the capacity in which you consider me to stand towards your sister?"
- "Good heavens! In this case it was meant as a compliment. Where are you going?"
- "I fear to receive more such compliments, and besides, Lucie is alone in the garden. I had better resume my office of Cerberus at her side."
 - "But, my dear Fräulein!"

She stopped; but turned her head away angrily. Bernhard rose and went towards her.

- "Are you vexed with me?"
- "Yes," replied Franziska, energetically; but instead of going out, she turned round and resumed her place at the table.

Calmly, as though nothing had happened, Günther sat down opposite her again.

"It is remarkable," he began phlegmatically, after a pause, "that we cannot be together for five minutes without quarrelling."

"It is not at all remarkable," declared she, still with irritation. "No one could get on with you for five minutes, even."

"I thought I got on very well with every

[&]quot;Adieu!"

[&]quot;Franziska!"

one else," said Bernhard, still with the same phlegm.

"Because every one else allows you to domineer over them. I am almost the only one left who opposes you at all."

The Fräulein's tone betrayed plainly that she had not yet recovered from the "Cerberus." Nevertheless, Günther did not find it at all necessary to let himself be disturbed by it.

- "You are," said he dryly, "quite as quarrelsome as you used to be at home."
 - "And you just as inconsiderate as ever!"
- "Possibly! We were always snarling and fighting together; the peculiarity only was that all the same we never could remain apart."
- "We wished to speak of Lucie!" interrupted Franziska.

Bernhard frowned slightly. "You have a remarkable habit of changing the conversation whenever it begins to become interesting."

- "What may be interesting to you, is not necessarily so to me."
- "Why?" He looked steadily at her. Franziska struggled with a certain embarrassment; however, she soon conquered it.

"I can quite understand that you like to look back upon the days of your youth," said she evasively. "You have risen high enough for a simple keeper's son. I—well, for me, life has been bitter enough, and I have not climbed higher than to be your sister's governess. I certainly do not forget my position, Herr Günther. I only wish, many a time, that—you would not forget it either."

A peculiar harsh pride lay in the frank exhortation, and now her glance met his as steadily and seriously as though she expected he would cast his eyes down, but this did not take place. Günther rose suddenly and went to her side.

"You should not have said that to me, Franziska," said he quietly, "nor need you reproach me with my success. I have found life 'bitter enough,' too. You know that my father's second marriage drove me from my home. He did not find the happiness hoped for in his new wife, nor I a mother in her. Our fortune, too, was lost at the same time. When my parents died, I was obliged to support my little orphan sister with my hardly-earned savings. The world, of course, only knows the upstart, sees only the height

upon which the forester's son stands; the twenty years which lie between, years full of care and labour, full of endless toil and cease-less struggle, those it does not see. Fortune, indeed, has cast nothing into my lap without striving hardly for it. Step by step I had to fight my way to riches and possessions—half a life-time I have spent over it; would you grudge it me if I love to return to childish days? But, it appears, I must not allude to that period before you. You fly from it."

Franziska bowed her head, slightly taken aback. "You are right, Herr Günther, but—"

"'Herr Günther!' That means, in other words, that I must equally relinquish the familiar 'Franziska,' and with it all youthful recollections?"

"I believe it is better we should both do

so!" said Franziska, sorrowfully, as she went quickly to the window and looked out, as if much interested in something.

Without saying a word, Günther returned to his seat, and again took up the newspapers which he had previously been reading. A cloud lay on his brow, although his features did not move. Fortunately, Lucie's entrance put an end to the uncomfortable silence which ensued. She came, still heated from playing with the children, threw her hat with all her wonted recklessness upon the table, herself into an armchair, and buried her head deeply in its cushions.

"Well, have you exhausted your love of play at last?" asked Bernhard, looking up from his paper; at the same time a searching glance scanned the girl's face.

- "Oh! I only did it to please the children!"
 —something closely akin to great weariness lay in Lucie's voice—"and, besides, I knew that you were holding an important conference here with Fräulein Reich, at which I should probably not be tolerated."
- "Possibly, as you were the sole subject of the conference."
 - "IP"
- "Herr Günther!" interposed Franziska, as she left her place at the window and drew nearer to the table.
- "I do not see, Fräulein Reich," he laid a slight, but to her, comprehensible emphasis upon the mode of address, "why we should trouble ourselves any more with conjectures and fears, when in Lucie we have the proper source before us. However wilful she may

be, an untruth has never crossed her lips, and I consider her incapable of falsehood, under any circumstances. Come to me, Lucie!"

The girl's eyes travelled in surprise and somewhat distrustfully from her governess to her brother, but she immediately obeyed the latter's request, and went to his side.

"Have you spoken to Count Rhaneck since that evening at Baron Brankow's?"

Bernhard attacked her suddenly, and without any preparation, with this question. Lucie blushed deeply and glowingly, but her brother was right—she was not capable of a falsehood.

- "Only once, on the following day," said she softly.
- "On that day then, when you were alone in the wood?" Günther sent such a glance, vol. II.

full of meaning, towards Franziska, who turned away annoyed, as Lucie's manner did indeed harmonise little with her persistence that the Count was an object of indifference to the girl.

"Did he speak of love to you again?" continued Bernhard.

"No!" It was apparent that the examination began to pain Lucie already, and that she would not endure it for long. "We only exchanged very few words at all. He offered to accompany me."

"Which you accepted?"

The colour flowed still hotter than before into Lucie's cheeks. "I did not go with him," she said shortly, with gasping breath, "he remained behind in the meadow—and now, Bernhard, ask me no more. You see your

prohibition was obeyed. I shall not reply another word!"

She pressed her lips together stubbornly. Bernhard saw plainly that not another word could be extracted from her, and he knew his self-willed sister too well to employ severity in this instance.

"That will do," said he gravely. "It is sufficient for me that the Count did not accompany you, and that you have not spoken to him since. This has not occurred, has it?"

" No!"

"Listen to the child!" said Franziska, in undisguised astonishment. "Where did you get that decided 'No' from all at once, Lucie? One might fancy it was your brother!"

The girl turned away, but the lips, lately

pressed together so firmly, trembled slightly. It was unmistakable that it annoyed her greatly to have the encounter discussed by others, and now Franziska added fuel to the flames most bountifully.

"But why will you not tell us anything of that which passed between the Count and yourself?"

"For pity's sake, do not worry me for ever with the Count!" Lucie broke out with such passionate violence that Franziska, completely overlooking the rudeness, hastened to her in alarm.

"I thought so; there are tears again!" said she, in an undertone, and essayed to fold the girl in her arms. But Lucie seemed to be less disposed for this sympathy. She tore herself hastily away, conquered her

tears suddenly, and forced her lips into a smile.

"I am not crying, not at all! But I must go now and change my dress, as Bernhard will drive me to C— in half-an-hour. He always shrugs his shoulders sarcastically when I am not punctual, and to-day he shall certainly not wait for me!"

She was out of the room. Franziska shook her head as she looked after Lucie.

"Now she will throw herself upon the sofa upstairs, and cry again! Will you at last believe that the child is unhappy, without choosing to confess it either to herself or to us?"

Günther had risen, and walked thoughtfully up and down the room.

"You are right! I did not believe that

the affair was so serious! Her interest in the Count seems to be greater than a passing emotion of vanity, and yet she rejected his companionship. I should never have thought that my warning would make such an impression."

"Nor I," said Franziska, very candidly.

"Lucie is usually in the habit of doing exactly the contrary of that which she is advised to do."

"Never mind. I should have preferred to avoid all intercourse with the Rhanecks; yet the affair must be settled. I see it now! I shall write and forbid the Count to approach my sister any more. His behaviour at the ball gives me the right to do so, and thus deprive him of the pretence that his constant presence here is owing to chance."

"Do so!" said Franziska, with cordial approbation. "I wish I could dictate the letter to you. The Count should have something to read, such as he probably never received before in his life!"

Notwithstanding his clouded brow a smile crossed Günther's face.

"I believe it is better for me to write without dictation this time. Do not be afraid of the letter being too mild; one may be very calm, but yet very crushing, and I have no reason to spare the Count now that I am sure of Lucie. You will see that she is ready in time. The distraction of the drive will do her good."

Franziska merely nodded, but when Günther left the room she started up as though from deep thought, and struck the table so violently with her hand that the flower vases rattled, and she said in a tone of invincible certainty—

"And yet she does not care for him!"

Half an hour later Lucie was seated in the carriage by the side of her brother, who frequently had business in C—, and as the road thither lay through lovely mountain scenery, he occasionally took his sister with him.

Only at one spot was this road irksome and toilsome; it ascended by a steep, winding path to the top of the hill, at the foot of which, on the opposite side, the road divided, that on the right hand leading to C—, and on the left hand into the mountain's range.

Although the horses were young and powerful, they panted and steamed with the exertion. Bernhard let them stop, and left the carriage with Lucie. The animals had enough to do to draw it when empty to the summit, while its occupants followed on foot.

Lucie, whom the ascent did not inconvenience in the least, ran fleetly on in front. Bernhard followed more slowly. Suddenly the girl stood still, without going a step farther forward.

- "What is the matter?" asked Günther, as he came up to her.
- "Oh, nothing! I only thought we might walk more slowly."

She took hold of her brother's arm, and pressed herself close to his side. He did not take any notice of this.

Now, in the bend of the road, he perceived a second carriage; it was a closed one, be-

longing to the monastery. Its occupant, a Benedictine, had descended from it and was also walking by its side.

Bernhard certainly did not generally care to have much to do with the inhabitants of the Convent.

However, this time he appeared to wish to make an exception. He had barely cast a rapid glance at the priest before he, too, hastened his steps. Lucie clung firmly to his arm.

"Do not hurry so, Bernhard! Let us stay behind."

Günther looked amazedly at her.

"Why? It is Pater Benedict? To be sure, you do not know him! You would hardly notice him that night at Baron Brankow's!"

- "I did, though!" said the girl, softly, in a half-suffocated voice. "I—I am afraid of him—of his—his eyes. Let us stay behind!"
- "Do not be childish, Lucie!" interrupted Bernhard, impatiently, as he drew her on.

In a few moments they had overtaken the young priest, with whom Günther, quite contrary to his usual habits, was the first to exchange greetings.

"You, too, are making it easier for your horses, Pater!" began he, in a friendly manner. "The road, certainly, is steep enough, and the nags have plenty to do to draw an empty carriage. One must make some sacrifice for them now and then."

Benedict, at the sound of approaching steps, had turned round, and then remained motionless as a statue.

Perhaps it was the exertion of the ascent that deprived him of his breath, and drove the blood so surgingly into his countenance; and yet his words contradicted this surmise, as he replied, after making a silent bow—

- "For my part, I like walking."
- "I cannot exactly say the same for myself!" said Bernhard. "But here we are in the mountains, and we cannot have everything quite so easy as at home on our level high roads."

He walked slowly on, while the young priest, it seemed as if half under compulsion, joined him; it would have been much too marked to stay behind, when his carriage was already so far in front.

Lucie hung silently on her brother's arm,

without taking the slightest part in the conversation.

Benedict looked straight before him; not even one single glance fell to her side.

It never entered Bernhard's head to observe his sister; but instead he seemed to bury his eyes in the young monk's features, just as searchingly as on the evening of their first meeting.

"I do not know, Pater, whether you remember me," he began again. "We saw one another at Baron Brankow's, certainly, without being introduced."

"Of course! I know the proprietor of Dobra," was Benedict's softly-spoken reply.

Günther bowed slightly. "We are taking a drive to C—," remarked he, carelessly. "You, too, appear to have a journey before you."

- "I am going into the mountains to N-."
- "So high up? You have a long, toilsome journey before you. You are, of course, going to pay the Vicar a visit?"
- "No. I go to act as his chaplain, and shall remain there some months, perhaps the whole winter."
- "That is certainly no enviable post!" said Bernhard, with unmistakable sympathy. "N— lies in the most uncultivated, inaccessible part of the mountains; it requires perfect heroism to think of spending a winter there."

The monk's lips quivered. In spite of the averted glance, he had seen how Lucie's bosom heaved a deep sigh of relief when he spoke of his absence.

"There are enemies more difficult to con-

quer than frosty nights and snowstorms," replied he, coldly.

Bernhard looked up in surprise. Were the words meant to be full of pathos? They should not then have been uttered with such bitterness.

"Pardon me, Pater, if I address a somewhat indiscreet question to you," said he quickly. "You were born in B—?"

Benedict looked surprisedly at him. "No! I come from the south of Germany."

- "Oh! Then my fancy was a mistaken one.

 A certain resemblance struck me. I think I knew your mother."
- "Hardly! She died in my boyhood, as did my father, on Count Rhaneck's estates."
- "I perceive my mistake. Pardon the question."

Benedict made a deprecating motion. "Do not mention it."

"He knows nothing, then," muttered Bernhard. "They have really kept him in perfect ignorance."

They walked on in silence. Benedict appeared half to repent having allowed himself to be drawn so far out of his reserve, and besides the top of the hill lay already before them, where the carriages were waiting.

Günther's coachman was just putting the drag on, but he was so awkward about it that the chain slipped between the wheels and was caught and broken by them, as the horses moved unexpectedly.

The master seeing this from a distance, knitted his brows.

"Joseph is stupidity itself again to-day! I

must look to it myself; otherwise we shall be going head-foremost down the hill." He gained the summit quickly, leaving his sister and Pater Benedict alone.

Lucie had remained on the spot where her brother had dropped her arm. Benedict seemed to wish to follow him; but he too stayed now as if rooted to his place; a distressing silence reigned for a few seconds, which weighed upon both like a mountain's load.

"Are you going far away?" at last began Lucie, who could not endure this mute position any longer, and in order to break it, seized upon the first question that entered her mind.

Benedict raised his head slowly—
"Far enough for your wishes, Fräulein!
VOL. II.

You doubtless fear that the unwelcome warner may cross your path again? Calm yourself, I did it once only, certainly it should not happen a second time."

"I—I did not mean it so," said Lucie, looking timidly to the ground.

"No! And yet you drew such a breath of relief when you heard of my departure?"

The girl blushed. Yes, certainly she had breathed more freely at the news, as with his departure the spell must surely be lifted which this man had exercised the whole time upon her, even when he was not at her side. Franziska was right, she had fought angrily against it often enough—and powerlessly; how powerlessly she only felt now again in this moment, and yet some of the old

defiance rang in her tone, as she asked, impetuously—

"How can you know that? You never once looked at me during the walk!"

Nor did Benedict look at her now, but the fleeting colour came and went in his countenance, as he replied in a suppressed voice—

"What for? I know, without doing so, that you fear—and hate me!"

It was the same reproach as Lucie had hurled at him that time in the wood, and she allowed it to pass over her as unopposedly as he had done. But the priest seemed to have expected some remonstrance or denial, his lips trembled as before, when no answer ensued.

"See how good it is that I go! Farewell!"
However, the intense bitterness which gushed

forth in these words touched Lucie, she made an involuntary movement to retain him. Her blue eyes looked amazedly and questioningly at him again; they must exercise a peculiar, controlling power upon the gloomy monk, he stood motionless, and the sternness disappeared slowly from his brow and lips.

"Did I wound you? We will not part so! I shall not return for long, perhaps never return. Farewell!"

This sounded quite different from the farewell he had spoken previously. Again his tone was full of softness, his eyes of that deep mild look which had struck Lucie once before as being so mysterious. Must every meeting with him bring her that inexplicable pain, which now awoke again and overcame her with a truly crushing power, as he turned away from her? The agony of parting which raged in the man's breast, seemed to have found an echo; the girl pressed her hand softly to her heart, which she still understood so little, and of which she only knew that it hurt her.

Günther in the meanwhile had had the drag put to rights, and helped to do so with his own hands; he looked up somewhat astonished, when he perceived the young priest coming alone; he thought it rather inconsiderate of the latter to have left his sister alone in the road so unceremoniously. Benedict passed him with a curt, hasty "goodbye," entered his carriage, and the next moment was rolling away down the hill. Then at last Lucie also appeared.

"Well, I must say Pater Benedict is not

guilty of any special politeness towards ladies!" said Bernhard, assisting her into the carriage. "He might indeed have walked with you these few remaining steps to the top, as he was in our company!"

"I do not want his politeness!" declared Lucie, throwing herself impetuously into the corner of the carriage.

"I believe you, child! His manner is much too repellant to be able to please you, besides it would be quite useless, as he is a monk."

Lucie made no reply; fortunately Bernhard took no farther notice of her, the merely temporarily repaired drag occupied all his attention, he was constantly cautioning the coachman to be careful during the descent. Lucie was quite indifferent to the danger; it would have been equally immaterial to her if

the drag were to break again and the carriage be overturned, she lay with her head buried deeply in the cushions, and did not trouble herself about anything in the world.

Benedict meanwhile drove in the opposite direction, still farther into the mountains. He leaned out of the carriage window and the fresh free mountain breeze played refreshingly around the young priest's pale brow, upon which there still lingered traces of the late struggle. Once more he seemed to stand on the spot of parting, once more to taste the intoxicating poison of that presence—now it was overcome! Nearer and darker the mountains rose before him, the gigantic snow-clad crests planted themselves between him and temptation; their impenetrable rocky walls should separate

him from it for evermore. He deemed the conflict ended, deemed himself buried in the snowy summits, while a fiery young heart still beat wildly, glowingly in his breast; he did not yet know the might of true passion, before which distance and barriers fall powerlessly, passion which with devastating strength can force its way through mountains' depths and human statutes, until it reaches its object—or its ruin.





CHAPTER III.

More than three months had elapsed, summer had taken its departure, and the autumn's storms swept turbulently and wildly over the mountains. All who did not live from year's end to year's end on their estates began to think of returning to the town, and in Castle Rhaneck preparations for the migration of the Count's family to the capital were also being made; the Count himself had not been there for some time, his appointment had called him during the previous month to his Sovereign's side, whence he only returned for a few days, in order to escort his wife and son.

On the morning following his arrival hehad at once ridden over to the monastery, and the two brothers found themselves again in the Prelate's study. As on the previous occasion the Abbot sat in an arm chair, and the Count stood before him leaning upon another: it was the same room with the dark velvet-covered furniture, and the heavy purple silk curtains, but the sun's glow which then rested upon the valley and forced its way into the sheltered apartments of the abbey was now wanting; the summer's brilliancy and summer's luxuriance were missing from the external landscape, now it lay sombrely, enveloped in fog, and the mountains which then rose so vaporously blue, to-day disappeared entirely in the clouds.

"But enough of politics and town!" said

the Count, breaking off the conversation. "I come to obtain news of Bruno. Is he still in N—? How does he fare?"

- "He is well!" replied the Prelate, laconically.
 - "And zealous in his new post?"
 - "Very zealous!"

Rhaneck started at the tone.

- "What is it? What is the matter with Bruno? Is there anything wrong for me to hear of?"
 - "Do not expect anything good!"

The Count drew himself up passionately.

- "Well, what is it about Bruno? Pray speak!"
- "Pater Benedict has far surpassed all your and my expectations!" said the Prelate, with unmistakable scorn. "In the three months

during which he has acted for Vicar Clemens he has raised himself to be the apostle of the mountains, and has made that remote village of N— into a pilgrimage, to which people resort from far and near to hear him. He does indeed preach wonderful doctrines; it needs but one touch, and our opponents would welcome him as one of themselves, and as such raise him on a pinnacle."

- "For heaven's sake!" cried the Count, interrupting him at last, "and you permit this? Why did you not restrain him?"
- "Because I mistook the magnitude of the danger! I always considered Benedict dangerous; that he should outgrow me so rapidly, so gigantically, I never thought."
 - "And you have not interfered?"
 - "What was absolutely necessary has been

done," said the Prelate, gloomily, "but it was done too late; he had time to cast the brand amongst the people. I spared him long for your sake, and also for my own, as I desired at any price to preserve this power for the Order. It is the first time in my life that I made such a mistake; it has revenged itself bitterly."

"But what has Bruno actually done?" asked the Count, uneasily. "When I left, you appeared to be quite satisfied with his behaviour."

"I was so in the beginning. He stood his first trial as a preacher splendidly—somewhat too boldly, perhaps—but I had expected and wished it to be so. Our mode of preaching has long since outlived itself; it is no longer of any use to hold fast to the old traditions.

We require fiery, energetic orators more than ever, who understand how to utilise the new ideas from which the people can no longer be preserved, so that we may retain the old power even in these modern days, and Benedict would have been the man for it, as he possesses the gift of working upon the masses, and, in spite of his mental superiority, of making himself intelligible to them. I saw this with increasing interest, but soon he went too far; I warned him once, twice. He always allowed himself to be carried away again. At last I determined to recall him, as the affair became serious, but he anticipated me on the last church day, when the whole population of the district thronged to the yearly pilgrimage feast at N-, by delivering such a sermon to the people—such a sermon." The Prelate clenched his hand involuntarily. "What can the madman have been thinking about when he dared to utter that from the pulpit? he must have known that it would bring him to ruin!"

The Count paled slightly.

"The sermon was—heretical?"

"Worse than that; it was revolutionary. The sedition which his oath forbids to himself, he preaches to others, and I fear he has already inflamed them. The Alpine people up there are an unruly, wild race, whom we have ever controlled only with difficulty and trouble. In the constant struggle with the mountainous nature around them, they learn resistance to everything, even to the confessional and church; that weak-minded Clemens, like the other vicars, gave them their own way too

much, and now, with the addition of such a tutor as Benedict, I should not wonder at all if it were to break out amongst them, and, while we are obliged to employ all our powers here to suppress the elements of fermentation, and to offer resistance to the ever advancing movement, up yonder the revolt would be carried out en masse!"

The Prelate had risen, and walked up and down the room in evident excitement; all his calmness seemed to have deserted him. The Count still supported himself heavily upon the chair.

"And what have you decided to do about Benedict?" asked he, apparently composedly. But his eye followed his brother uneasily, as the latter walked to and fro.

"Naturally I forbade him to preach any

more, and sent for him to answer for himself. I do not doubt that he will obey, and expect him in a few days; I did not dare to recall him at once. The peasants cling to their chaplain with a perfectly fanatical enthusiasm; they would be capable of gathering together and retaining him by force, did they suspect what lies before him."

The Count shuddered slightly at these last words.

- "What shall you do?" asked he, with an effort.
- "Whatever the rules of the Order command in such a case. Benedict has challenged the clerical tribunal; he will feel its whole weight."
- "Brother, for God's sake you will surely not—?"

"What will I not?" asked the Prelate, standing still. "Do you think I could yield to any consideration now? To you, Bruno certainly has been everything from the beginning; you never loved your Ottfried!"

Rhaneck turned away.

"That the Countess inspired you with no affection, I could understand," continued the other; "she was not the woman to bind you, and you made a sacrifice to the glory of our house in your union with her. But that you should maintain this mortal indifference to your son, the only son and heir she presented to you, it is for that I reproach you, that which I cannot understand."

"Ottfried's effeminate, egotistical nature is not in sympathy with mine," said the Count, defending himself moodily. "He bears my features, but he bears not a trace of my temperament."

The Prelate went a step nearer, and rested his hand upon the table.

"I know who has your temperament, if he does not bear your features! Take care, Ottfried! That temperament once precipitated you into endless errors, out of which my hand alone rescued you; it will be his ruin, too! If that love affair of yours once—"

"Cease!" cried Rhaneck, threateningly.
"Do not utter that word; you know, you best of all, that it was a marriage!"

The Prelate shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"A marriage! One concluded between different religions, in a foreign country, without your father's consent, without the

necessary formalities in such a case! The church never recognised these Protestant nuptials; the law declared them void afterwards."

"All the same, I shall not permit you to cast a shadow of blame upon Anna! She became mine at the altar, was joined to me by priest's hand. What did the girl of eighteen know of our law demanding different forms? What I did afterwards, driven to it by your ceaseless urging, stirred up by that fearful event, does not fall upon her; that—may God forgive me!"

He pressed his hand passionately to his brow; the Prelate looked at him perfectly unmoved.

"You did what the name and honour of our house peremptorily demanded. What was folly in a young insignificant officer in foreign service, became a crime when fate unexpectedly made you the heir, and finally the owner of Rhaneck. Why did the citizen's daughter dare to stretch out her hand to the Count's coronet. That was her ruin! Lucky for you that she died; you had enough without her, in the child!"

"I never was allowed to possess it!" burst from the Count, in overflowing bitterness. "You demanded the boy at once for the Church; you undertook the care of his bringing up, his education. I was hardly even permitted to see him now and again!"

"Was I to leave him to you, so that your mad tenderness for the boy might betray the secret to the whole world; its veil had been lifted too high already! What position could he have occupied towards your wife, towards your son? The Church was the only place in which his birth could be atoned for; the only path to honour and respect, which you were so wishful to obtain for him. You know what plans we cherished for him! Is it our fault if in his blindness he thrusts back the hand which would raise him, and precipitates himself into the abyss?"

"He has let himself be carried away in an unhappy moment; he will come to his senses, will return—"

The Prelate shook his head.

"He will return no more; he is irretrievably lost! He has betrayed himself too completely. It is the old rebellious Protestant blood, which once created the Reformation for us, and gave us work for so many centuries:

it flows in his veins too, and revenges itself upon us for having forced him beneath the cowl!"

He resumed his walk through the room. Rhaneck followed him, and placed his hand, as though imploringly, upon his arm.

"Spare him! You can still do it, because as yet you are the only judge. Spare," his voice sank into a whisper, "my blood in him; it is your own, too."

"I would not spare you, Ottfried, if you stood thus before me!" said the Prelate, freezingly. "You do not know how far he has already gone. There read;" he drew a paper quickly from amongst others in a portfolio lying on the writing table, and held it to his brother. "Here you have his last sermon, word for word; here the list of books which

he studied at night. The key to the whole is to be found in them!"

The Prelate smiled unnaturally—

"Do you tremble with deadly fear for your favourite? Be calm, we do not live in the middle ages; the days are passed when disobedient monks were walled up, or forced by the rack to recant, we must now render account to the secular powers for every member of our Order; they have drawn our limits narrow enough."

"I know it," said Rhaneck gloomily, "but I know, too, that you have ample methods of withdrawing your sacrifices from this secular power. You declare them to be mad, and let them disappear from the eyes of men. That plea covers every cruelty, every torture of mind and body. How many of those whom

you pronounced to be mad were so in reality, how many only became so under your hands? Do not talk to me of the charity of monasteries! I ask you once more, what shall you do?"

The Prelate looked at him: it was an icy, pitiless glance.

"Whatsoever my decision as regards
Benedict may be, you will not alter it in any
way; you relinquished your rights over him
when you dedicated him to the Church, the
monkish vow destroys all other worldly bonds.
Now he belongs to me, his Abbot, and I will
deal with him as it seems best to me."

"Nor now, nor never!" cried the Count in burning rage. "I will not submit to his being sacrificed! I have allowed myself to be guided too much by you, too often already

bowed to your stubborn will, but now we have reached the limits, I tell you; touch not Bruno, or I will assert my right before the whole world, and will expose you and all your monastery!"

The Prelate stepped back; on his brow, too, now appeared that furrow which had long since stood menacingly on Rhaneck's, but his voice rang in calmly crushing intonation.

"You are out of your senses, Ottfried, otherwise you would not thus threaten me. Who would be exposed in such a case? Is it I, perhaps, whose name and honour are at stake, if you bring an affair to light, which would hardly now be judged as it would have been five and twenty years ago? Try it, though, begin by discovering yourself to

Bruno—the first inquiry will be for his mother?"

The Count paled, he let the hand which was raised threateningly, fall again.

"He never loved you!" continued the Prelate mercilessly, "all your care, your affection for him, ever met with that shy avoidance, that instinctive dislike. Speak the fatal word, and his hatred would be ensured to you!"

The Prelate had adopted the right method of curbing his brother's violence; an expression of pain passed over the Count's features.

"I know it!" said he in a hollow voice, "and that is what I cannot bear. You have ever made this love into a cause of reproach to me; it is all that I have saved out of that dream of youth, and, say what you may, it is

the best part of myself. But once more, brother," he drew himself up firmly to his full height, "this is the limit beyond which I defy you. If Bruno has erred, let him answer for himself, punish him so far as your position as Abbot and the secular authorities permit you, but beware of withdrawing him from that authority which would protect him from the worst. I will never abandon him. for good or evil, to your monkish revenge! Beware of letting him disappear from before my eyes; I will find out his traces, and then not in vain shall I be the powerful influential Count Rhaneck. Your priestly might has a limit, and I should spare nothing if you drove me to extremities! Farewell!"

He took his departure, he had spoken more calmly than before, without such wild fury,

but on that very account the warning had more effect. The Prelate looked grimly after him; he saw how the power, which he had always exercised with the superiority of a cold unemotional character over his passionate brother, crumbled into ruins; he knew better even than the Count, that its limit was reached. He was lost in moody meditation when the Prior was announced, who entered immediately and approached in his wonted fawning, humble manner.

"I come to receive the orders concerning Pater Benedict, from my most reverend Abbot," began he solemnly. "We may expect him any day after to-morrow. Your Reverence doubtless wishes, in any case, to hear his defence first?"

"Defence?" asked the Prelate sharply.

"None is needed here! If he acknowledge his words, as I do not doubt, nothing will be left but to bring him to trial. I have already reported the case to the Archbishop, and expect his reply hourly. All the same, I know beforehand, what I have to do, and that perfect freedom of action will be left to me."

"And I, too, am convinced that absolute power will be granted to us!" said the Prior with a pious upward glance. "The impious one must be punished, and the deeply offended Church reconciled by repentance, and atonement, so that her welfare—"

The Prelate made an impatient movement, "Cease that unctuous tone! You know that I do not love such sanctimoniousness, least of

all when we are alone. It is not a question of making atonement to the Church, but of protecting her from a danger here, where the example of one could become fatal to the whole class. I am determined to use the utmost severity!"

A triumphant glance shot from the Prior's eyes, but he immediately lowered them again humbly to the ground. To-day the Prelate could only be treated cautiously, it was seldom that he gave way to such sharp unguarded words, as now; something must have irritated him fearfully, and it was not difficult for the sly monk to connect the preceding visit of the Count, and its probable topic of discussion, with this irritation.

"The utmost severity!" repeated he slowly, "without doubt! If only Count Rhaneck do

not interpose! I think," he corrected him quickly, "he will assert all his influence the benefit of his protégé."

"In such matters I am not affected by brother's influence!" declared the Pre with hard decision.

"I know it, your Reverence, I know i assented the Prior, "but it might be, Co Rhaneck cherishes most unwonted into in Pater Benedict—if he were to atte against your will—"

He did not dare to go farther in insinuations, it was sufficient for him the Prelate remained silent, and did repulse him haughtily, as would usu have been the case. Evidently the broth had already come to a quarrel about Rhaneck had probably threatened, now

must strike secretly. The Prior knew his Abbot.

"The Count knows, or at least suspects, what awaits his *protégé*," continued he more gently, "he will hardly abandon him, and if he will not—"

"If my brother will not?" the Prelate raised his head with an angry glance. "You surely forget that I alone can will here!"

"Not at all, your Grace! It all depends upon what the verdict against Pater Benedict be, and how far your Grace intends to go. Any excess might be serious, even dangerous. What has been ventured upon now and again in the case of a few disobedient monks, about whom no one enquired, and whose pious relatives were pacified by the simple assurances of the cloister, we dare not attempt

H

here, where so powerful a protector as Count Rhaneck stands in the way. The Count is much esteemed, very influential at Court, and our most gracious Sovereign very alarmingly liberal in such matters; if the affair were to be talked of there—a single step beyond the limits prescribed to us, might be our ruin."

The Prior knew well what he was doing, as he dropped one dart after another into the Prelate's soul. He could certainly only tell him what the latter had already long since weighed in his own mind; but still it sounded quite different from the lips of another, with that slight admixture of scorn, with repeatedly bringing the brother into prominence as a superior power before which they must bow: the proud priest drew himself up.

"On that point where my spiritual authority is touched, I yield neither to my brother nor do I yield indeed to any one, let him stand as high as he may! For thirty years I have governed this monastery, and for thirty years it has been a pattern in the country, upon which not the slightest shadow has fallen! If in all the other convents around us, weakness, apostacy, and treachery have developed themselves, I knew how to preserve mine pure, and come what may, an apostate shall never go forth from its walls! Never, I say! Or Benedict recants, or he succumbs to his fate! This decision neither Count Rhaneck nor the Sovereign himself can change; they are only men, and the highest power upon earth lies in our hands—the hands of the priests, to whom they, too, must bow. I but acknowledge Rome to be my master!"

He stood there erect, almost with kingly bearing. He was once more the powerful, over-bearing Abbot, who would recognise none as above himself, and, in perfect consciousness of his sovereignty, was ready to defy all. The Prior cast his eyes down in a species of timid admiration.

"It would be hazarding too much," he began again, "were we to risk the names, perhaps the existence of the whole convent for the sake of one only! Pater Benedict forces us into a heavy struggle by his return. The best would be—if he did not come at all."

"He will come!" said the Prelate, positively. "He will come before us and confess to every single word. I know it!"

"If it lie in his will, certainly! But could not some accident—the mountains are very dangerous, the torrents of rain during the last week have let loose the streams, and made several parts perfectly impassable. Pater Benedict cares very little for such dangers; he walks alone for many miles if his duties call him to a sick person, or to a distant pilgrims' chapel—if he were—to meet with some accident!"

The Prelate stared amazedly at the speaker for a moment, then suddenly turned his back upon him and went to the window, where he stood still, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon the landscape without. The Prior followed him.

"I speak naturally of a chance only—of a bare possibility—but it cannot be denied that it would relieve us from a fearful pressure. Our young brother will not be brought to recant under any circumstances. To let him go or to punish him with temporary penance would be opening the gates to heresy. If we would interfere seriously, Count Rhaneck stands in our way—it is a bad, bad business! In fact, I see no way out of it!"

The Prelate did not reply. The Prior went one step nearer.

"A mishap, certainly, that came at the right time, would solve much—would solve all. It would deliver our convent from a disgrace never yet experienced—that of counting an apostate amongst its numbers. It would spare us the necessity of coming into collision with the secular powers for overmuch severity. Count Rhaneck, too, would

have to be satisfied, as who can be responsible for a misadventure! In this case, it would be of incalculable advantage!" He spoke slowly, softly, but emphasising every word; the Prelate still stood immovable. The iron composure of his features betrayed nothing, but yet something like internal conflict lay in the gaze which rested upon the distant, cloud-enveloped mountains.

"When does Benedict return?" asked he, at last.

"The day after to-morrow, I believe."

A long ominous pause. The Prelate turned slowly round; a fixed, icy expression stood upon his countenance.

"You are right! It would be the best solution of all. But can we command the chance?"

"Most Reverend Father—" The Prior said nothing more, but his eyes rested as if in eager scrutiny upon his superior's face, as though he would read every word, every thought from the latter's lips. The Abbot's glance glided unconsciously down upon the writing table beside him, where the papers still lay which he had previously held before the Count. He leaned his hand heavily upon Benedict's last sermon—not in vain did the haughty priest bear the consciousness that the highest power upon earth was placed in He felt himself to be a judge of his hands. life and death.

"Pater Prior! I dictate nothing, and accede to nothing! Take note of this! What is done for the welfare of the Church, I will—absolve."

The Prior bowed silently; he knew enough. With a few indifferent remarks, he hastened to take leave, and then left the room. The Prelate still stood at the writing table, his hand resting on the fatal report; but as the door closed behind the Prior, an expression of boundless contempt passed over his features.

"Miserable man! Would you make me into a tool for your private hatred? Upon your head alone be it! And if Benedict be lost to us, and if he must fall, he is worth ten such as you; even in his fall I would have sacrificed them all with a lighter heart than I can him!"

The Prior stood outside in the cloisters which united the Prelate's abode with the monastery. He, too, looked towards the

cloud-surrounded mountains, and his gaze flashed again with the same venomous, deadly hate as once before in the sacristy.

"At last, then, we are so far! It was no good hour in which he dared to threaten me. Shall I let him return so that in his fall he may betray me? Rather may the fall—happen elsewhere. The Prelate will screen himself; that is all right. He must protect me in the worst case; in me he protects the honour of his monastery. Pater Benedict, you possess such magnificent talents for an apostle of freedom, I fear you will become a martyr to your doctrine!"





CHAPTER IV.

AUTUMN had made its entrance into the mountain districts, but how different from its manner of so doing in the plains below, where nature descends so wearily and slowly into the grave, over which winter soon spreads its white shroud. There grey and heavy skies hang over the veiled earth, the fields lie extended in one continuous monotonous brown, the river flows quietly and darkly, and all colour or form that may still be left is enveloped by fog in its dense damp pall. Softly and unvaryingly the rain comes down, softly and feebly the foliage

falls from the trees, sadly the wind rustles amongst them until the last leaf flutters, faded to the ground, and the wood stands bear and desolate—everywhere slow decay, quiet, resistless death.

In the mountains, what a contrast! Here, all is in turbulent motion, all in defiant, desperate struggle for existence. Storms, such as the plains never know, break their fetters, and, once let loose, rage with devastating might. Gathering masses of clouds float up and down the valleys, or chase one another lashed by tempests round the highest peaks, and swollen by torrents of rain, the mountains' waters rush along in unbridled fury. Here, too, hang the veils of mist, damp and thick, on wood and rock, and only the dark pines raise their inflexible heads

more sturdily than ever, those heads which not all the icy blasts can rob of their green adornment; and forcing their way through robes of cloud, the most rugged peaks and cliffs tower above all more grandly than ever. Autumn has torn its flowery wreath from the mountains, but there ends all its power, lashes itself with impotent violence against these rocks and woods, which cannot be bereft of their leaves and cannot be shaken. Winter will, indeed, never be quite master of this refractory nature, and if it do bury and prostrate all beneath its burdens of snow, it cannot stay the living, ever throbbing life-blood of the mountains: it can never place those streams in its icy fetters, and when all else around stands rigid in snow and ice, that life rescues itself, which ever new, ever full of motion, the only thing unconquered, breaks forth from the lowest depths of the mountains, flowing away into the fresh spring verdure.

N-, Vicar Clemens' parish, was of those lonely, loftily-situated hill-villages which are only in communication with the plains for one half of the year, while, during the other half, they are almost, even at times wholly inaccessible, owing to the autumn's storms, winter's snow, and spring's floods. The little hamlet lay closely clustered on its high plateau, nestling beneath the church's wings, which, as though also needing protection, stood in its midst, and, indeed, it was small and unprotected enough amongst the high, snow-clad mountains which surrounded it and looked down like giants upon the tiny human habitations which one of their storms alone could annihilate. Meagre, decrepit-looking pines bordered the edge of the plateau. The woods did not commence until lower down, where the road descended into the Strom Valley. It certainly was not a regular high road, and even in the most element seasons of the year it was difficult to reach N— otherwise than on foot.

Out of the parsonage, whose exterior betokened plainly enough that it was but a very poor living which had been assigned to Pater Clemens, there came two clergymen, who walked slowly through the village, now and then responding to a respectfully-made bow, or blessing a child which ran towards them to kiss the reverend gentlemen's hands.

When they had left the houses behind

them and stepped into the open country, the cold mountain air met them with piercing keenness.

"You ought to return, your Reverence," said the younger of the two, drawing his cloak more closely around his shoulders. "The air is much too raw, and it looks as though we were to have another storm."

The elder man shook his head.

"I shall accompany you as far as the crucifix at all events, dear Benedict. I have spared myself more than is fitting already since you have been here. The short walk will do me good."

Benedict raised no more objections, and they went on silently for a few moments, before the Vicar resumed the conversation.

"If only there were not this daily walk to

the Pilgrims' Chapel! I can never divest myself of a certain dread for you."

"Why?" asked Benedict, composedly.
"It is not so very long."

"But dangerous! You have always to pass the 'wild gorge,' one of the worst points in the whole range. In the summer it would be nothing; but now, when the continuous rains render the rocks smooth and slippery, when one never knows whether the bridges have really been able to resist the last storm—"

"The peasants always choose that path, in order to shorten the road into the valley!" interrupted the young priest, indifferently.

"Yes, our peasants! They are born and bred in the mountains. Their feet do not often slip, besides, even in falling they know

how to hold and cling firmly; yours, on the contrary—I cannot help it—each time that I see you go I feel uneasy, and am only at peace again when I know you to be safely home within the Vicarage."

"I never become dizzy," said Benedict, quietly. "Nor can I on that account deprive the people of a habit which for months has become such a necessity to them, as this daily mass at the Pilgrims' Chapel."

"But it is not directed by the Church," suggested the old Vicar, timidly. "I myself—well certainly, for long my strength has not been equal to such daily fatigues, I was obliged to spare it for absolutely necessary walks to the sick and dying—only held service there on pilgrim days."

"But it is an immense saving for the in-

habitants of all the separate detached farms, if they do not need on every occasion to come the whole of that wearying road to N—. They save time and strength, which are both so requisite for their work, and I have leisure enough, especially now "—a bitter expression played around his lips—" now when I am forbidden to preach, and am only allowed to perform mass. Besides, to-morrow I shall go that way for the last time."

The Vicar looked up in alarm.

- "For the last time?"
- "Don't you know that I have been recalled to the monastery?"
- "But only for a few days, it is to be hoped."

Benedict shook his head gloomily.

"They will hardly permit me to return. I

know the Prelate! The little measure of freedom which this post gave me has proved too great; he will not fail to withdraw me."

"You mean your sermon on the last Church-day? Herr brother, Herr brother!" The old man's voice trembled; but he broke off as he perceived the frown on the young priest's brow. "Well I will not worry you about it; but I cannot get rid of the deepest anxiety. Stay here, Benedict! Pretend to be sick, or try by any plea to postpone your return. No good towards you is brewing in the monastery! Here you are safe; the parish clings enthusiastically to you, and would, in case of need, defend you; in our midst they would not dare to touch you."

"I shall go!" declared Benedict, positively.

"But mistrust has long been felt towards you," continued the other, more urgently. "Our schoolmaster—I do not wish to speak evil of the man, as I have no proofs—but it never pleased me that he should force himself upon you, from the very first day, with such remarkable anxiety to serve. You were never cautious enough about your books and your writings. I fear they have been examined more than once. Even I was bidden," he faltered, and looked confusedly on the ground.

"Did they even wish to degrade you into becoming a spy?" asked the young priest, bitterly. "An unhappy post, especially when practised towards a guest, who has slept for months beneath one's roof."

"What I report does not injure you, Herr

brother," replied the old man, gently. "Let the monks call me a weak-minded old fellow, who does not see or hear what goes on around. I prefer to bear even that rather than precipitate you into danger by one incautious word."

Benedict did not reply. He merely held out his hand in silence.

"You will stay, though?" once more began the Vicar entreatingly, after a short pause.

"I cannot! Do not think that I place overmuch trust in the Prelate's leniency. I know what awaits me, or, at least, suspect it; but I must value life more than I do to follow your advice. I assure you, it is very—very indifferent to me; I do not even care to move a hand to preserve it." In the meanwhile they had gained the crucifix, which stood at the edge of the plateau, just where the road to the Pilgrims' Chapel branched off. Both priests stopped.

"You should not speak thus, Herr brother," said the Vicar, with gentle reproach. "You are still so young."

"And you already so old, your Reverence," slight scorn rang in Benedict's voice, "and yet you still cling to this existence, which for you has indeed been full enough of self-abnegation? What have you attained by this wretched living up here, which only barely preserves you from starvation, which for twenty years has excluded you from the world and from mankind, and where you only witness scenes of poverty and misery? For this you have parted with life, wasted your

future, forsworn happiness—the exchange is certainly too unequal."

Calmly did the old man's light blue eyes meet the darkly-flashing glance of his young brother.

"I never asked for it," said he, simply.

"I accepted it as a duty appointed to me, and have striven honestly to fulfil it. It has, indeed, not always been easy for me. I have lived through hard times up here; there have been days and weeks when I have hungered with my poor villagers, because I could not bring myself to be hard in collecting my small tithes, which they, with the best will, could not procure; and often it has been still harder only to be able to expend spiritual consolations when I would so gladly have helped with physical ones, and where help was so

necessary. As the Lord will! I am now more than seventy. It cannot last much longer before I lay my head down to rest. If life has vouchsafed me but little good, I can still bear the conviction with me that I have laboured honestly in my poor vineyard; God knows it—I was not worthy of a better one!"

Such touching resignation lay in the simple words that Benedict gazed silently at the old, weary life which inclined so quietly and patiently to its grave, which, without a murmur or complaint, looked back upon the lot that had been decreed to it; but for the young priest this quiet resignation was only one more stab; he still was full of the frowardness of youth, which may understand how to perish, but not how to renounce, and

he was in the act of replying passionately, when steps sounded near them. Two-strangers, wrapped in cloaks, came towards them from the village.

The presence of strangers here was something so unusual that the two priests broke off their conversation and looked at the newcomers in astonishment.

Benedict seemed to know them, and immediately the frankness which he had displayed towards the Vicar disappeared, and was replaced by his former reserve, as he went towards the travellers and greeted the elder of the two politely but distantly.

"Count Rhaneck, you here?"

The Count offered his hand, and then turned to the Vicar.

" Pardon me, your Reverence, but my visit

I am very anxious to speak. They told us at the Parsonage that he had just left, and that we could still overtake him."

The old man bowed politely before the two distinguished gentlemen, whom Benedict introduced to him.

"Will not the Count return with us? This place and weather are not adapted to conversations in the open air—"

"No, thank you," interrupted Rhaneck, quietly. "Our conversation will only be short; and besides, I hear that Pater Benedict is on his way to his duties. I should not wish to be the cause of his being late."

The Vicar perceived from the stranger's manner that the conversation was one of importance. He therefore took his leave, while

expressing a hope that the gentlemen would do him the honour on their return of entering his Parsonage for a few moments.

The Count accepted absently. He waited with visible impatience until the priest was out of hearing, and then turned quietly to Benedict.

"We were seeking you, Bruno! As you see, Ottfried has accompanied me. You parted in anger, and still owe that reconciliation to one another which I demanded of you. What you then refused in the heat of the dispute, you will now grant me. Ottfried offers you his hand in token of peace; you will accept it?"

The words were mild, but uttered in a tone of peremptory command.

Ottfried's countenance betrayed plainly

that the advance on his part was a compulsory one. Nevertheless, he put out his hand obediently. Benedict did not move.

"Well?" asked the Count, still quietly, but in a sharper tone.

The young priest stepped back.

"Pray spare the Count and myself a ceremony which is equally painful to us both, and will not alter our mutual position in the least," replied he coldly.

Ottfried let his hand fall again, as though relieved. Yet a flash of bitter hatred was shot from his eyes upon the "servant's son," who dared to reject his advances in this manner.

Rhaneck's eye passed slowly from one to the other. No greater contrast could be seen than between those two as they stood there side by side. The young Count, with his blonde hair, light eyes, and his listless, lifeless features, which, plainly as they told of their descent from the Rhanecks, much as they resembled his father's, yet did not display the faintest sign of that characteristic expression which was peculiar to the proud race, and the pale, firmly-chiselled countenance of the young priest, with his black curling hair, and deep blue eyes. Not in one trait, not in one line were they alike, and yet they had one thing in common, the tall, slight figure, the peculiarly proud turn of the head, their gait, and their carriage.

This resemblance to-day, when Ottfried wore a dark cloak, was more remarkable than ever. Seen from a distance, they might have been mistaken one for another. This fact

seemed to force itself upon the Count, too. His glance lay drearily and moodily upon both the young men, and at last remained fixed upon the elder.

"This time it is you, Bruno, who would still increase the old, unholy breach," said he, reproachfully. "Be it so, then; in an hour's time you will think differently; you will then offer your hand in propitiation. I know it. Leave us alone, Ottfried."

The young Count obeyed, but the old anger surged hotly within him again as he withdrew.

Recent events had not remained concealed from him, and he guessed only too well what his father purposed by this sudden journey into the mountains. He would warn his protégé, save him, perhaps, from the menacing anger of the Abbot; but why he took his son with him, why he all at once insisted so obstinately upon a reconciliation after months had elapsed since the quarrel, Ottfried could not explain to himself. Irritated as he was already, it annoyed him still more deeply that the Count sent him away so unceremoniously, because the former wished to speak to Pater Benedict; annoyed him all the more because he was obliged to confess to himself that the priest had never been treated equally ruthlessly. This monk might, indeed, permit himself to do anything, he showed it again now in refusing so decidedly to obey his noble benefactor's command, and the Count, who knew so well how to suppress every symptom of rebellion in his own son, ap peared powerless to resist this stubbornness.

The enigmatic relation in which they both stood to one another, and which had occupied Ottfried's mind ever since that meeting in the wood, rose once more before his mind, but to-day he was as far from discovering its solution as ever.

Rhaneck now found himself alone with Benedict, who, as usual, stood before him silent, gloomy, and without the slightest appreciation of the evident proof of interest which his patron had again given to him by his presence in N——.

"Bruno, for God's sake, what have you done?"

Benedict raised his head in cold defiance.

"What I have done I shall know how to defend! In any case, my Abbot only has VOL. II.

the right to demand an explanation—I shall give it to him and to none other!"

Rising anger at this rude reply struggled with another more painful emotion in the Count's face.

"These, then, are the thanks for all my anxiety and care for you," said he bitterly. "I have certainly never possessed your confidence, but for some time you seem to turn away from me in regular enmity."

Benedict lowered his eyes; the reproach awoke that feeling of shame in him once more that was ever in conflict with the secret aversion of which he could never divest himself towards the man to whom he owed so much.

"I have confessed to you once for all, Count, that I can only offer you ingratitude in return for your goodness; pardon me, and —give me up."

At the least sign of yielding on his favourite's part, all anger disappeared from the Count's manner.

"Give you up! Then you know at least that danger hovers around you! Bruno, how could you venture to preach that unholy sermon? You must know, you must consider the consequences it draws down upon your head!"

The young priest raised his dark eyes once more.

"If I had considered at all, the whole affair would have remained undone. I am still monk enough to preserve the obedience which I have vowed to my superiors, and I know that that sermon was in direct opposition to

it. But when I found myself in the midst of all those assembled pilgrims, who bowed in blind devotion before me—when I could not but think that perhaps hundreds of them would some day force their children into the same fetters which now crushed me to the ground—I was overcome by an irresistible power, and carried away against my will; I could not bridle my words any longer—only when I returned from the pulpit did I regain consciousness of what I had actually said."

Rhaneck shook his head.

"The misfortune lies in the place where you said it. Had it been here in N—, before a small congregation, the affair might still perhaps be smoothed over, but before the people who had flocked from afar, the thousands of pilgrims, who bore away your

words to the remotest corners of the mountains—that my brother will never pardon!"

- "I know it!"
- "Why did you not confess to me that you hated the profession to which I dedicated you?" asked the Count hoarsely. "I should not have compelled you, by heaven, I should not have done it, notwithstanding all my brother's urgency! But I believed it to be quite in harmony with yourself, and with your future."

Benedict smiled bitterly.

"Had I felt on the day of my ordination as I feel now, no power on earth would have forced me into this gown. You forgot that I was brought up in a priestly seminary, where all will and action are led blindly in but one direction, where no minute remains

unwatched and unemployed. Only in the cloister did I find time for thought, amidst all outward control I found freedom enough to live for myself, and then only came the awaking—too late!"

With a deep sigh Rhaneck sought to tear himself away from the agonising thoughts.

"We will not quarrel about that which is past!" said he decidedly, "the present contains evil enough. You have been recalled to the convent?"

- "Yes!"
- "And you will obey the call?"
- "My Abbot's commands? Certainly!"

The Count made a hasty step towards him.

"You must not return, under any circumstances! Must I be the first to tell you what awaits you there? Does not the fate of so

many of your fellow thinkers warn you, and have you not been a monk long enough to know of what revenge a monastery, of what revenge your brothers are capable? And you have exasperated them fearfully, Bruno, you have thrown the gauntlet down before them—they cannot forgive you!"

The young Chaplain leaned with folded arms against the pillar of the crucifix, and fixed his eyes firmly upon the speaker.

"And what do you require Count that I should do? Would you have me offer open resistance to the distinct order that I shall return, and thus let it come to measures of force?"

The Count cast a rapid glance around them; Ottfried was far enough away to be unable to overhear a syllable of the conversation, yet his voice sank to a whisper, but in the whisper it trembled.

"No! only one course remains, flight! Rapid, undelayed flight—to another country if it must be;" he was silent for a moment, and a deeply drawn breath forced itself painfully from his bosom, "if it must be—to another religion."

Benedict started.

"And you say that to me, Count Rhaneck? The brother of my Prelate, the head of the old staunchly Catholic race, which has ever sought its honour in being called a pillar of the Church? Such counsel from you?"

"If I give it to you, you may grasp the magnitude of the danger," said Rhaneck in a hollow voice. "What it costs me, you cannot imagine, Bruno, but your rescue is

in question, and for that no price is too high."

That "insane tenderness," with which the Prelate had so often reproached his brother, breathed forth once more from these words. Benedict felt it, too, but it found no echo in his heart. Bewildered, suspicious, he stepped back, and again that open-eyed, astonished glance met the Count, but this time decided suspicion lay therein.

"Before we go any farther, Count, I should wish to beg you to explain this unaccountable interest in my fate!" replied he, eagerly. "I have often asked myself what motive could cause you to show for so many years such great care to a poor strange boy, and have never been able to find an answer. But now when you would

sacrifice your own convictions, when you would break with all your family traditions for my sake, now it seems to me that I have a right to this answer. I beg for it most urgently."

The young priest's manner betrayed' plainly that in spite of all, he had not the slightest suspicion of the true nature of the secret into which he sought to penetrate; the Count looked silently and fixedly at him.

- "You shall learn it!" said he at last.

 "That I had decided upon before coming here, and it must be done before we part.
 But first answer me, will you fly?"
 - " No!"
 - "Bruno, I implore you-"
 - "I shall stay!"

Rhaneck made a passionate movement.

"Oh, unhappy, stubborn fellow! I have so often in myself—" he broke off suddenly. "Why will you not seize upon the means which I offer you? I tell you there are none other."

Benedict drew himself up firmly.

"Because my conscience and my vow forbid it! The Prelate may be pitiless unto cruelty; from mean, from low motives he never acts, and to that which he decides upon for me, in the name of the Order I must bow. I have once for all taken that unhappy vow at the altar, and it has for a long time already become a curse for me, and although it now precipitates me into ruin, I cannot break it. With equal right could a husband tear himself from his wife to whom he pledged his troth, on the same spot every word, every bond could be loosed which binds mankind together in love and faith. What would be sacred upon earth, if the altar and plighted vows were not! And if I must pay for mine with my life—I shall stay and await my fate!"

A proud, passionate fervor lay in these words, something of the power of that sermon by which the young priest had lately carried the assembled pilgrims away with him, but upon the Count it exercised quite a different effect. He stood there like one condemned. His eyes bent on the ground, his quivering lips pressed firmly together, his countenance deadly pale, but across his brow again passed that burning look which became darker and darker at each word which seemed to strike the proud man in his in-

most heart, and crush him to the earth—he looked as though he must fall beneath their weight.

Benedict passed his hand over his brow and drew the cloak around his shoulders again, from which his hasty movement had caused it to fall.

"You know my resolution now, Count, it is irrevocable, and in return I beg for the promised answer."

The Count raised his eyes slowly from the ground, and fixed them with an indescribable expression upon the petitioner's eager features; pain, shame, desperate bitterness, all lay in that one glance; then he turned silently aside.

"I beseech you!" repeated Benedict, more urgently.

- "No!" said Rhaneck in a hollow tone.
 "Not now!"
 - "But you promised me-"
- "Never!" repeated the Count more passionately. "I tell you, you shall never learn it, at least not from my lips—you yourself have closed them."

The young priest was silent. He made no farther attempt to penetrate the secret, whose promised revelation was all at once so obstinately refused to him, but the suspicious expression once more lay upon his brow, and he drew back more distantly and coldly than ever from his benefactor.

The Count struggled visibly to recover his self-possession, of which Benedict's passionate declaration had deprived him; he summoned Ottfried; but when the latter, following the

call, stepped to his side, he seemed to falter once again. It appeared as though, in spite of all, the momentous word forced itself again to his lips, as though he would still venture upon another attempt at reconciliation: he turned to Benedict.

"You persist, then, in returning to the Monastery?"

"To-morrow evening I shall be there. Tell the Prelate that the strength which he wished to preserve to the Order, is lost to it for ever; but, notwithstanding this, I have remembered the words with which he dismissed me at my departure—'I am capable of everything, only not of perjury!'"

The Count started again slightly, and the raised hand, with which he was about to grasp that of the young priest, in order to

lead him to Ottfried, sank listlessly to his side; silently he pressed his lips together. Neither of the young men uttered a word; they stood opposite to one another averted in sinister antagonism, curbing their anger with great difficulty. The Count's presence still kept them within bounds. If these bounds fell, that scene in the forest would perhaps be repeated whose fearful termination he had found it so hard to hinder. He did not know the secret spring from which this hatred arose, which had once already forced weapons into both their hands, and therefore he underrated the danger; he was contented with the prohibition that they were not to meet in enmity. Could a powerless word, a prohibition stay the full, burning passion of youth? The one word which could put an end to the enmity between them, and force them to reconciliation, remained unspoken—no fore-boding warned the Count of what this silence should cost him, and of what agonies he should by it call down upon his own head.

The farewell was hasty and short on his part, frigid on Benedict's. Rhaneck, accompanied by his son, set out upon his return journey to Dobra, while Benedict resumed his walk, so long delayed, to the Pilgrim's Church.

Vicar Clemens was not wrong in dreading this daily walk for his young brother, especially during the present season of the year. It was a lonely and dangerous path, in which there was only room for the steps of one person at a time. On the right the rocks rose up precipitously, and on the left fell as abruptly into the depths below; the path

L

VOL. II.

wound steeply down the hill, over loose, slippery stones, past rushing brooks and withered pine trees, until it reached the "wild gorge." From some distance the raging and foaming of the water could be heard, as it whirled far beneath on the ground of its stony bed; on both sides the naked cliffs ascended suddenly and sharply, the summits inclining close to one another, as though they wished to meet and touch. It seemed as if a volcanic power had cleft the mighty walls of rock, and torn them asunder, where, between them, the river now roared upon its way. A narrow bridge, roughly constructed out of trunks of trees, and with merely a slight railing as support for the hands, hung across the ravine half-way down the rocks. Only a faint ray of daylight

illumined it from above—just gleam enough by which to recognise that the "wild gorge" indeed merited its name; nothing wilder could be imagined than the scenery visible from this bridge. Eyes became dizzy in striving to gaze upwards and grasp the dark, cloven stones, hanging over in such heavy masses, seeming ready to fall and crush the weak path; and they became dizzy when they peered into the depths below, where the water swept along, raging and hissing, the foam-lashed waves for ever breaking at the foot of the cliffs, whose sides rose so perpendicularly that they did not even leave the space of a hand's breadth between themselves and the wild element. Like an icy breath, the air enfolded the lonely wanderer; damply and coldly it kissed his forehead and blew upon him as with a blast from the grave; here the traveller must not look above nor below, but gaze firmly and steadily upon the path before him would he cross it without peril.

Benedict stepped fearlessly upon the bridge; for months he had traversed it day after day, without touching the railing, without taking even the most ordinary precautions, he went rapidly forward. Perhaps his steady eye gave him this courage; perhaps also that indifference to life, which he had so lately avowed to the old Vicar; and it was surely something worse than mere indifference to it which, on arriving at the middle of the bridge, now stayed his steps, and caused him to gaze so steadily down into the seething foam below. Gently gliding, came the temptation,

it was not the first time that it had approached him on this spot; until now he had always overcome it, but to-day, after that conversation with the Count, which betrayed plainly to him that which he had previously only suspected vaguely, the fate awaiting him-today he could not meet it with his wonted resistance. As if entranced, his eyes clung to the sombre abyss, to the water winding its way, hissing and varying its colours like a snake, and softly, as with serpent-like tones, the sound of this hoarse roar rose to him. it became a language which smote upon his ear ever more plainly, more distinctly, yet it was but the echo of his own bewildered thoughts.

"Why deliver yourself into the hands of men, when your own can end the doom into which you have now fallen irretrievably? One fall—one last cry, perhaps—and the cold waves would dash over the hot brow which cannot unlearn how to think, over the wild glowing heart which cannot beat coldly and calmly beneath the holy gown. And yet it is all, all in vain, because of that one evil word with which you vowed yourself to the Church, which binds you for time and for eternity! It tears you away from life, that with all its rich treasures, all its sunny radiance, like a distant dream of fairyland, once rose within you but to sink again for ever; it draws you back into the old servitude, into the silent halls of the cloister. Obedience is the name of the first, the principal vow of the Order, and the monk must follow it, even if he know that the way which he is bidden to go ends

in an abyss? Wherefore renew the endless, useless strife, of which the victory is never decreed, one resolute step, and the chain would be severed, the burden would fall from your shoulders for evermore?"

Benedict still stared immovably into the depths, but heavily, more heavily he rested upon the railing, which already trembled and shook beneath his hand; his temples became moistandicily cold—lower and lower he bowed his head—one more second, and the white arms of the waves below, which stretched themselves out so greedily towards him, would receive their victim.

Suddenly, a strange sound rang across, distantly, softly, half lost, but yet it penetrated to his ear. Involuntarily he raised his head and listened. Now the wind bore

the tones fuller, more powerfully, towards him. Yonder, in the Pilgrims' Chapel, the bells were ringing and summoning to mass—the church was calling her priest. There the worshippers were awaiting his coming, and the consecrated hand which should give them the blessing was raised at this moment in suicide!

Slowly Benedict withdrew his arm from the railing which, in the next moment, would have yielded to the weight of his body—slowly he raised himself, and averted his eyes from the inviting depths. The iron voice of duty sought and found him upon the most perilous path; this duty, long since denuded of its charms, so deeply hated and yet undertaken by oath—this duty became his saviour. In vain did the waves stretch forth their arms

again to him, in vain they lured and beckoned him down to them—the clear bells' notes rang out louder than the dull voices of the deep: with one long, heavily-drawn sigh, the young priest tore himself away from the temptation, and went resolutely forward; the fatal bridge was left behind—behind him echoed the weird seething and hissing, only the bells' peals stole far away through the air, far away over the mountains, and erectly, with firm steps, he followed the path they pointed out to him—the path to the altar.



"Do not take it amiss, Herr Vicar, it does blow disgracefully uphere in your hills! One ought to have five pairs of hands to hold one's hat and shawl and umbrella, besides all the other things, or they would dance away into next week round that snowy peak above. It is difficult enough to keep one's own feet, else the wind would take them and without more ado carry them away into one of those bewitched ravines below, where nor sun nor moon can shine, and where, like your pious saints in the calendar, one would have to live on frogs and fir cones, until one is discovered by a merciful peasant, and restored to one's fellow creatures. The horrible roads here have already cost us our carriage; the wheels were more sensible than we, they would not go any farther, and preferred to break in half; we ourselves are almost dead from climbing along this thing which calls itself a high road, and possesses holes and pits large enough to swallow up a coach and four with driver and all. Let any one talk to me of the mountains' beauty! I maintain they are created by our gracious Lord on purpose to make life bitter for His creatures, which seems to be considered necessary in this world!"

Vicar Clemens, who was at that moment entering his house, heard himself thus suddenly addressed from behind, and, turning round hastily, looked in astonishment at the lady who uttered this harangue, somewhat in the tone of a lecture. The expression of her face at the same time was as angry, her gesticulations as energetic as though the poor priest alone were responsible for all the discomforts described; and the latter actually, in the first moment of astonishment and amazement, began to feel that he was guilty of all.

"I regret exceedingly," said he, confusedly and timidly. "I am very sorry, but I—I really cannot alter the fact that the climate is very rough in our hills."

The lady laughed aloud at this apology, and confidingly came a step nearer.

"No, your Reverence, you cannot indeed," said she, good-temperedly. "Nor did I

mean you, not in the least! I meant nothing unkind in attacking you thus. We come as two helpless women to you, and beg for shelter and protection during a few hours. You need not be uneasy."

Notwithstanding this assurance, the Vicar still retreated nearer to the door, while he looked up shyly at the apparition, which certainly coincided as little with the picture usually conceived of a "helpless woman" as did the tone in which she had introduced herself resemble an entreaty.

She was a tall, powerful figure, carrying a comfortable, thick travelling shawl, which certainly was draped around her more to protect her from the storm than with a view to artistic folds. With her left hand she held her hat on her head by its ribbons. Judging

from its crooked position and the considerable undulations in its brim, it must have several times attempted to fly from the spot to which by right it belonged. With her other hand she supported herself upon a large umbrella, which had also been very much ill-used by the storm, and showed traces of the limestone ground, upon which it had served as an "alpen-stock." Behind her, a smaller, more delicate figure now became visible, completely enveloped in a grey waterproof cloak, which enclosed the whole tiny form from head to She had preferred to remove her hat feet. entirely, instead of being obliged to hold it constantly, and as she carried it in her hand, her ringlets, exposed to the wind, flut-The "disgraceful tered in all directions. breeze," which roused her companion's ire.

appeared to cause her less trouble. The fresh little face, flushed by the sharp highland air, rather expressed pleasure in the adventuresome drive, and her little mouth quivered as if it were with difficulty that she suppressed her laughter at the comical reproaches with which her companion besieged the poor Vicar, and at the visible terror the reverend gentleman felt for the resolute lady.

However, he invited her to enter his house, and she followed this invitation, but suddenly stopped on the threshold, and said in a sharp tone—

"Before we enter, I must acquaint you with the fact that we are Protestants. Do you understand? Heretics of the most genuine sort out of North Germany! We will not deceive you, and shall not allow our-

selves to be converted either. If, in consequence, you would turn us out, pray say so at once, as we must then see if we can find a reception in the so-called inn, although no respectable human being could look at it, much less enter it, without offending every sense of cleanliness."

The Vicar was obliged to smile at this original confession of faith on the door step. "I am not wont to ask my guests what their creed may be," replied he, kindly, "and gladly place my simple house at every stranger's disposal, to whatsoever persuasion he may belong."

"Indeed? Well, then you are an exception to your brethren!" said the lady dryly. "Excuse me for being so out-spoken, but, as I said, we shall not let ourselves be converted,

and one must be cautious in this country; I do not trust the Catholics. I wish I knew what there is to laugh at, Lucie! I believe you are foolish enough to find pleasure in this abominable expedition. Like a chamois you sprang before me all the way up the mountains, while I—" she looked sadly down upon the wreck of her umbrella, "without this I should have been lost!"

In the meanwhile, they had entered the house, and Franziska immediately began to lay aside her hat and shawl, while she related more circumstantially to her host that they were returning from a little trip to A—, that for shortness' sake they had chosen the road across the mountains, and that their companion, who was still below with the luckless carriage, had sent his sister and herself on in

advance to wait for him at the next village, where they hoped to obtain a conveyance, which, as their horse fortunately was uninjured, could take them back to Dobra to-day.

"A conveyance can easily be obtained," said the priest readily, "that is, provided your companion soon arrives, otherwise it might not be advisable to attempt the return journey to-day, as night would overtake you while still amongst the hills. You would, in such a case, have to make the best of my hospitality. The guest-chamber certainly has been occupied for some months by my young chaplain, yet he would gladly resign it to ladies, and for the strange gentleman, too, a place can be found."

Until now, Lucie had not removed her mantle, but occupied herself in looking about the study, which served at the same time as the Vicar's state and reception-room. She examined the simple old furniture in an unembarrassed manner, the not overnumerous books, and the faded engravings on the walls, representing sacred subjects, or scenes out of legends; but at the last words she suddenly became attentive.

"Where are we then, really, your Reverence?" asked she, quickly, and the Vicar wondered why, at so simple a question, the girl's blushes should rise to her forehead.

"Yes, indeed, what is the name of the nest?—I beg your pardon, I mean parish," Franziska now chimed in. "We were only directed to the next village without mentioning the name."

"You are in N-."

It was well that the Vicar turned to Franziska in speaking, and that she looked at him, thus the crimson glow which now dyed Lucie's face still more deeply, escaped them both. She suddenly ceased all her little observations and fled to the window, where she remained, her gaze constantly fixed upon the door, as if she expected every moment to see something enter which caused her fear.

Fräulein Reich had ensconced herself comfortably in the arm chair, and commenced to put her host through a species of cross-examination: how long he had lived here, what income he received, his relations towards his congregation, and so on. The old Vicar, completely intimidated by the inquisitorial tone of the lady, stood humbly and frightenedly before her, and exerted himself

to reply to all her questions as accurately and correctly as though he stood before his archdeacon, on whose good will his position might entirely depend. The result of this examination was at last a half-angry, half-pitiful, shake of the head on Franziska's part.

"I should not like to be in your place, your Reverence!" said she, very decidedly. "In summer it may be bearable, but how you endure the long winter up here, so utterly alone, without wife or child—"

The old priest smiled, but this time it was sadly, and something resembling resignation lay in the glance which swept over the vigorous figure, full of life, sitting before him, and then remained resting upon the girl's lovely countenance, which at that moment was turned towards them.

"Our profession brings that with it," replied he, meekly.

"But that is, do not be offended, a most horrible decree of your Church," continued Franziska, most unabashedly, with her dreadful frankness. "With us every right-minded clergyman has wife and children, generally half-a-dozen of the latter! We carried it still farther; there were twelve of us in the parsonage, and if the number of the holy apostles did sometimes make my father almost distracted—a country clergyman with us has no regular stipend—I assure you the clergy live and pray better when all their clerical descendants make a noise near the study door, than in such desolate houses, still as death, where no mouse even moves. father would not have liked to spare one of us; thank God we all grew up, and how we grew up!"

At the last words she drew herself up to her full stately height, and looked defiantly at the Vicar standing before her, as though she would ask if he did not think that she had grown up uncommonly well, and if he would permit himself, after this specimen, to doubt the exemplary flourishing of the remaining eleven clerical olive branches. Luckily such a thought was far from the priest's mind. He made a low polite inclination, which was intended to express his great respect for the lady and all her family, far more than by mere words, and, satisfied thereby, she resumed her seat.

"I cannot understand why Bernhard does not come!" said Lucie, now joining in the conversation. "He should have been here long since; I should like to go and meet him."

The governess shook her head disapprovingly.

"Why not, indeed! Have you not had enough of our scrambling expedition, Lucie? Do you want to be utterly blown away?"

"I should not go very far," said the young girl, "and I cannot miss him if I follow the road by which we came up."

Franziska still shook her head. But the Vicar, whom Lucie's secret disquietude did not escape, and which he naturally ascribed to anxiety about her absent brother, now interposed.

"Let the Fräulein go," said he, pleasantly.

"Nothing will happen to her here in our mountains, and there are no ravines or

abysses into which she could fall in the immediate neighbourhood of N—, provided that the lady do not leave the high road."

Franziska shrugged her shoulders.

"There you perceive what sixteen-year-old blood is, your Reverence! Not for a quarter of an hour can it endure being in a room; it must positively be out again in wind and weather! Do as you like, then, but do not go too far. Herr Günther will laugh at you on his arrival; he is the kind of man about whom one needs to be alarmed!"

Lucie did not hear the last words; she was out of the door already. Upon the threshold she stopped once more hesitatingly, but a step which descended the stairs, and which of course she could not know belonged to the old servant maid, drove her quickly out into

the open air, past the few houses, until she reached the end of the village.

Only at its termination did Lucie halt in her half involuntary flight. She hardly knew from what she was actually flying, or would not confess it to herself; but even the bare imagination of Franziska's sharp eyes and those of the Vicar resting upon her when the door opened and that tall, sombre figure entered, threatened to deprive her of all self-possession. The mere thought of this man's vicinity again awoke everything which had slumbered during the last few months, so that only now and then, as if in a heavy, uneasy dream her thoughts returned to that mysterious fear, that agonising pain, the whole gloomy spell which already enchained She would flee from this her once more.

spell, and foreboded not that in so doing she entered into the dreaded magic circle—that the danger which she imagined to be behind lay before her.

Arrived at the high road, Lucie looked in vain along its windings; neither Bernhard, nor the coachman with the horses, could be discovered. She decided to go a little way to meet her brother; she could not miss him here, and above everything she wanted to remain away from the parsonage so long as possible.

For some few minutes the girl had already begun the descent; the road which had cost Fräulein Reich so much trouble contained no difficulties for her light feet, when she suddenly heard steps behind her. She turned round, and stood still for a moment in trembling fear, but only for a moment, as she discovered at once that the hair was fair which fell upon the collar of the stranger's dark cloak, as he, bowing from afar, took off his hat at that moment. Lucie drew a deep breath of relief. Count Rhaneck! She had mistaken him from his gait and bearing for—another; it was strange how in those two points he resembled that other.

With a few hasty steps, Ottfried was at her side.

"These are indeed break-neck expeditions up here! Who else could possess such an elf-like foot, Fräulein, as yours, which glides away over these stones as over a dewy meadow. We poor mortals are not so fortunate as the fairies; the damp earth holds us implacably fast, and in verity only

the hope of overtaking such a fairy child could impel me to follow you upon this horrible road."

With this impudent gallantry, he joined her at once, and as though he had the right to do so, remained close by her side. Lucie involuntarily shrank a little away from him, so that the space between them became wider.

"To overtake me?" asked she, rather coldly. "Did you, then, know that I was here?"

The Count smiled.

"I saw you half-an-hour since; you and your companion were just entering the parsonage as we returned to the village. I had given up all hope of speaking to you, when fortune showed itself so unexpectedly gracious."

He might have added that in Franziska's presence—whom he, like Bernhard, but with greater reason, called "Cerberus"— he did not venture to approach her, but instead had invented the best excuse he could to persuade his father to precede him alone, and to leave him a few hours longer in N—, but he wisely omitted these explanations, and requested to be told to what chance he owed the pleasure of seeing Fräulein Günther here.

Lucie related, somewhat monosyllabically and reservedly, that they came from A—, the misfortune which had befallen them, and that she was at that moment going to seek her brother, who was probably still in the valley.

At this mention of Bernhard, the Count's features became dark, and he curled his lips scornfully.

"As regards Herr Günther, you will permit me to ask you one question, Fräulein. Your brother honoured me with a letter a little time ago which—dare I enquire if you were aware of it?"

"I? No!"

Lucie looked at him in astonishment. She did not understand how Bernhard, who had displayed such prejudice against the Count on every occasion, could write to him.

Ottfried smiled again; but this time with an expression of great satisfaction.

"I thought so! Then, of course, you are not at all to blame in the matter, and I shall not enlighten you any more about it, although I had every cause to complain of the cruelty which prevented my seeing you for so many months! Oh, Fräulein—"

He was now sailing away in his old style again, and gave play once more to all those arts of flattery and gallantry with which he had once fascinated the sixteen-year-old maiden at the ball. But, strange to say, these means, once so efficacious, were not so now at all; not since that time in the wood, when a strange hand had torn the net which he had woven around the inexperienced child's heart, with his flattering words; since that hand had placed itself so authoritatively upon her arm and dragged her away from that dangerous vicinity. Perhaps it was also an unconscious comparison by which Ottfried lost, as, even when he had expended the whole fire which stood at the disposal of his lustreless eyes, they still could not compete with the darkly-glowing glance which penetrated reprovingly and yet with such mysteriously controlling power into the girl's inmost thoughts.

Franziska was right. Lucie had become a different person since that day. With indifference, yes, with repugnance, she turned aside from a language to which she had once listened with so much pleasure.

It did not escape the Count that the young lady gazed at him to-day coolly and gravely out of her blue eyes; that she quickened her steps strangely, and only gave very monosyllabic replies. But any doubt as to his own personal attractions never entered his mind. He ascribed her changed manner entirely to her brother's and her governess' intimidation, and gradually became bolder in manner and words.

He complained passionately about the long separation, swore fervently that no power on earth should compel him to leave Rhaneck and return to the capital if he had the hope of seeing and speaking to her occasionally, and was on the point of repeating his former declaration of love, this time, in consideration of the damp, clayey ground, without falling upon his knees, when Lucie interrupted him all at once—

"Pray say no more about it, Count! I will not listen to it!"

Ottfried was taken aback; he had never expected this decided tone from the girl.

"You will not listen to it?" repeated he slowly, while slight scorn was perceptible in his voice. "Oh, Fräulein, can you really be so hard-hearted as to refuse to

listen to me, now that for once we are alone?"

Lucie blushed, but it was a blush of shame and annoyance, which the blood drove into her cheeks. For the first time she became conscious of how insulting was his manner of addressing her, which until now, owing to her inexperience, had escaped her. With becoming pride and dignity she said—

"I shall certainly be at liberty to do what pleases me, and I now tell you, Count, that I shall listen to you no longer. Leave me!"

Lucie was much mistaken if she thought she could thus drive the Count away; he was not the man to allow himself to be awed by even any such decided repulse, and the unexpected resistance, the sudden outbreak of defiance on the part of the girl, whom he deemed entirely in his fetters, gave her a new charm in his eyes.

"How wonderfully this anger becomes you!" said he, with a malicious smile. "You forget, however, that we are alone, and that I shall not be so foolish as to obey you, least of all without having first kissed the charming little mouth which suddenly utters such harsh words."

He bent down to her; but at the same moment Lucie was on the opposite side of the road, glowing with rage and indignation. She remained still for one minute.

They were just at that point where the shorter and certainly more dangerous road which led from N—, down over the "wild gorge," joined the highway. On one side,

through the firs, gleamed the white walls of a building—the Pilgrims' Chapel—which they had noticed on their ascent, and which lay hardly a hundred paces distant from the road. The girl's glance flew along the latter to see if her brother were not near, and as no one was to be perceived there, she quickly formed her resolution.

Without a word, without a look more, she suddenly turned her back upon the Count, and struck into the side path.

Ottfried at first stood still, astounded at this movement, which he could not explain to himself. After the lapse of a few seconds he followed her in annoyance; but it was already too late.

Stepping from amongst the fir trees, he perceived the church before him, and saw

how Lucie ascended the steps and entered the little open house of God.

The young Count bit his lips. He was too thorough a Catholic, too well schooled by his father and uncle in the forms of his religion, if only outwardly, not to respect the spot whither the girl had fled from him.

Why must this inconvenient church be here! But to have remained behind would have been too much like a defeat, and this thought Ottfried could not brook. His worldly experience came to his assistance. He also entered, crossed himself in the correct manner, made a devout inclination to the high altar, and then joined Lucie, while he asked quietly and politely, as though nothing had occurred, as though their conversation had merely been a harmless chat,

and the behaviour which he had permitted himself merely a triffing joke, if Fräulein Günther did not think that the churches here were very beautiful.

For a moment she looked at him utterly helplessly. Although she felt that he had quite changed his tone, and that here she was safe from any farther molestation, this manner of perfectly ignoring what had occurred, offended her almost more than a renewal of his impertinence would have done. Without deigning to reply, she turned her back upon him.

The church was quite empty; the worshippers had already left, and at this moment the priest came out of the sacristy, where he had laid aside his officiating robes. Behind him walked the sacristan, who looked at the strangers with a wondering glance, and then passed by them, in order to leave the church and go to his house, which stood close by; Benedict, who lingered a few moments longer near the altar, now turned towards the door.

As if lightning had fallen before him and robbed him for some minutes of speech and movement, he stood motionless there at the sight of those two whom, last of all in the world, he should have imagined to be here. At the same moment in which he perceived Lucie he saw the Count, too, at her side, and every emotion that the sight of her would have otherwise aroused, froze into deep, deadly bitterness; but he clenched his hand convulsively beneath his dark voluminous garment. This was what his warning had brought about!

Ottfried was not less astounded by this unexpected encounter. Fate seemed to have completely conspired against him today, but he was accustomed to recover himself quickly in similar situations, and felt that he must not on any account betray his defeat here. Building upon Lucie's peculiar shyness before the monk, which he well knew, he greeted the priest carelessly, and said, apparently with perfect composure—

"Pardon us, Pater, but Fräulein Günther wished to come inside for a few moments; you will permit us to see your church?"

Lucie paled. This bold impertinence deprived her for the moment not merely of selfpossession, but also of the power of denial.

But even paler than she had the young priest become; the glance which met her was full of icy, withering contempt, and yet agony of despair seemed to be concealed beneath it.

Without addressing a single word to her, he turned to the Count.

"Our simple house of God offers nothing noteworthy! I should have thought, Count, that you could have found sufficient and more suitable amusement for yourself outside, and so have been able to spare the church."

What the glance had commenced was completed by the cutting tones of these words. They restored self-possession and speech to Lucie; she felt vaguely that she could bear anything rather than the contempt depicted on that countenance.

"Count Rhaneck speaks an untruth!" cried she decidedly, but in a trembling voice,

and it was not Ottfried's vicinity which now made her tremble. "I was obliged to take refuge here from his pertinacities. I hoped the church would give me protection. The Count followed me all the same!"

A sudden gleam illumined brightly and passionately those features, which just now had seemed rigid as stone; the next moment Benedict stood by the girl's side and put his hand protectingly upon her arm.

"Fräulein!" cried Ottfried, hesitating between rage and confusion, "you place a peculiar construction upon harmless gallantry. Could I have foreseen that you would take a joke—"

"Enough!" interrupted Benedict in a suppressed voice, which he controlled with difficulty. "The Fräulein is under my

protection. Leave the church, Count Rhaneck."

Ottfried became pale with rage at these words, hurled at him in the tone of a command.

"Pater Benedict, you always have the singular good fortune to be inassailable, and take advantage of it, as it seems. Formerly your gown protected you, now the spot whereon we stand. Beware, even my patience may come to an end."

Benedict stepped close up to him. "You will respect this gown and this spot, even if you did not know how to respect the presence of a woman. I am still a priest, and as such I dismiss you from the threshold of the church; it cannot be employed in the service of your pastimes."

"You are a priest still!" Ottfried took refuge in scorn, as he knew by experience that this weapon wounded his opponent most sharply. "Exercise your priestly power to-day, it may be the last time that you will be permitted to speak in the name of the Church, which you sacrificed so recklessly in your sermons, and which it is to be hoped my uncle will be able to guard from your attacks."

The young priest's lips quivered contemptuously. "The Prelate's sentence is very opportune for you, Count Rhaneck! Let us cease from scorn. We are standing upon consecrated ground, otherwise—" He left the sentence unfinished, but the glance which concluded it made Lucie shudder, again that fearful flash which had once frightened her

away from Ottfried's side when dancing, and with which Ottfried scoffingly declared, "the fanatic would like to consign him into the uttermost depths," now that glance flashed once more in the dark eyes, and the depths—were not far off.

Ottfried might well feel that he should get the worst of it in that dispute, and therefore preferred to end it. He said shortly and haughtily—

"We shall discuss that hereafter, Pater Benedict!" and then quitted the church; only when outside did he give reins to his anger. The wind meanwhile had abated, but the mountains were becoming veiled. Deeply and more deeply the clouds descended into the valley, while the higher lying hills disappeared in a thick mantle of mist. The Count

looked down the road; all that was wanting now was for Günther to appear, and call him to account! If Ottfried did not exactly fear such a meeting-when accompanying Lucie of course he might expect it any moment—at all events he desired it still less. What treatment was left for this man if he permitted himself to be as verbally rude as he had been in writing! He could not be challenged to fight. Count Rhaneck and an under-forester's son! Therefore it was better to avoid any such encounter, particularly after that which had just taken place. With one embittered glance at the church, the young Count turned to the sacristan, who stood before his house looking at the weather.

"Is there no other road to N— than this one?"

The old man came nearer. "Surely, your honour! That footpath would take you to the village in half the time."

The denizen of the mountains certainly did not think that the road which he always traversed with such ease, might be difficult for the delicate feet of a townsman. But Ottfried was not in the mood to make many enquiries as to whether the path were good or bad; he made a careless sign of haughty thanks to the sacristan, and disappeared among the rocks in the direction indicated.

Benedict had remained behind in the church at the girl's side. He was right, it was only a simple little house of prayer, yet the religious fervour of the poor inhabitants of the mountains had ornamented it with everything which stood at the disposal

The incense still of their scanty means. clung about the half-lighted place; the dim daylight from without fell more dimly still through the narrow, long-since blinded windows, and wrapped the altar and pillars in a mystic semi-obscurity, while the arches above faded away in the deepest shadows. Faintlycoloured pictures, half-effaced inscriptions all around the walls, interspersed with wreaths to the memory of the dead, plenteously decked out with ribbons and tinsel, and instead of flowers, which could not be produced up here in the raw autumnal season, fresh evergreens at the foot of the Madonna's But the lamp, with its never-failing light, hung darkly-red above the high altar, the chains which supported it disappeared in the obscurity of the vaulted roof, it looked as

if it were a great glowing eye hovering over all, and gazing down steadily upon the pair below.

The young priest had not asked how Lucie came there, nor what chance had brought her alone into the Count's company; it sufficed him that this encounter was a compulsory one, and that she had fled from it to his protection. This meeting tore the last covering from the truth, which up here had risen with every hour, with every day, more distinctly before him, that this flight and struggle were in vain, that here distant and in solitude he lay more deeply under the magic of his passion than he did even in the Monastery. This young creature, who did not appear at all capable of understanding the depths of his mind, or even of suspecting them, who, with her childish blue eyes, only gazed into a world full of sunshine and pleasure, whose flowery path lay so far apart from the road which the gloomy, solitary monk had ever travelled, had nevertheless gained intense power over him, before which every other sensation sank helplessly—before which all strength of will bowed unresistingly.

Lucie stood shyly and timidly beside him; she certainly had no idea of the tempest which concealed itself beneath this cold reserve, but she had breathed more freely in Ottfried's presence, even when his character had discovered itself to her in all its repulsive aspect. Her indignation had roused all her defiance and pride, she had not even trembled before him at that moment, but here, in the safe protection of the pale stern priest,

she trembled. Only one eye existed which was capable of inspiring her with fear, and that eye was now fixed upon her once more, and she was again subject to the old spell.

The young girl's slight tremor did not escape Benedict.

"Do not be afraid, Fräulein!" said he, firmly. "I shall remain at your side until I know you are in safe hands. The Count will not molest you any more!"

Lucie raised her eyes involuntarily; there was something in his voice which inspired her with fear, and in his countenance she found the same expression in it again which had alarmed her in his words; a deep, ominous furrow lay upon his brow, which she had never seen there before.

"I am sorry that you should have been so angry with the Count on my account," said she, softly. "He will hardly forgive you."

Benedict smiled scornfully. "Calm your-self! The enmity between Count Rhaneck and myself does not date from to-day. He has ever honoured me with his hatred!"

"But"—Lucie hesitated, yet she could not withhold the question—"what did he mean by those mysterious words, that your priestly power is at an end? Will you not be a priest any longer?"

An expression of most intense bitterness swept over his features. "If I will? My vows are indissoluble. Our Church never sets its consecrated servants free; it is merely a question as to whether I may in future reckon myself amongst them!"

The girl's eyes fixed themselves upon him full of alarm and enquiry; he shook his head moodily.

"Do you think that I have committed some deadly sin? I have preached what the enthusiasm of a moment, and a warm heart for my oppressed brethren, taught me, not what Rome's Church directs. This requires atonement. They have already sat in judgment upon me at the Monastery. I know it! I have only still to receive my sentence."

- "And what can they do to you?"
- "Everything!"

Lucie made an involuntary movement of alarm. "My brother says," she began shyly, "it is dangerous to irritate the gentlemen in the convent. If you have irritated them—oh! for mercy's sake, do not return to them!

Remain here or fly! It may bring you to ruin."

She had no idea that the unconscious fear which suddenly overcame her at the thought of his danger betrayed itself in her voice too, that she laid her hand, as if beseechingly, upon his arm. Only, as that hand was suddenly enclosed by his did she try to withdraw it, but he would not let it go again.

"Twice already have I received the same advice to-day; the third and last time it comes from your lips. I cannot follow this last either; I cannot, Lucie. But—I thank you."

The girl shuddered slightly at these soft, trembling tones. At the sound of her name, which for the first time she heard from those dreaded lips, she had not the courage to draw her hand away from him.

"Pater Benedict—"

She did not finish, as she felt how his hand quivered, and suddenly let hers fall.

- "Pater Benedict!" repeated he slowly.

 "You are right, Fräulein, to remind me who
 I am. I was very nearly forgetting it!"
- "Is not that your name, then?" asked Lucie astounded.
- "In the monastery, in monkish gown—yes! They do not even leave us the name which could remind us of our days of freedom! I too, must change my worldly name 'Bruno' for the holy 'Benedictus.' That exchange, was not blessed for me."

He ceased suddenly, and Lucie did not hazard any reply. Dark shadows of clouds raced past outside, and the mists lay denser and closer round the little chapel. Through one of the open church windows the current of air blew in, and whispered softly amongst the faded leaves of the wreaths for the dead. More darkly glowed the everlasting light in increasing gloom, and shed its red gleam upon the altar steps, at which the two stood.

"You do not love the cloister?" asked Lucie gently, at last.

"I hate it!"

The girl raised her head with a touch of her former daring. "And why, then, do you not set yourself free?"

The young priest fixed his dark eyes steadily upon her face. She did not yet suspect what caused this glance to flash so strangely.

"Would you, then, so lightly cast yourself free from a bond to which a vow chains you, or trust a man who had done so? For instance, would you give your hand for life at the altar to such a man?"

Lucie was silent, struck by the singular question, and still more by its tone. There was a ring in it as of deadly fear, like the breathless enquiry of a prisoner, who expects to hear his reprieve or condemnation in one single word.

"I do not know!" she stammered out at last. "I—"

"You would not do it!" completed he, but his voice had suddenly become dull and toneless. "I knew it! Do not start back from me in affright!" continued he, with increasing passion, as she, really alarmed by his mysterious manner, drew back a step. "I will not force this hand to become mine.

That which is allowed to the servants of your Church, has ever been denied to the priests of Rome. The altar at which they receive their wives, freely and openly before all the world, stands eternally between us and this happiness in life. Choice between resignation and sin is only offered to us, and if one cannot resign and will not desecrate the vow, only one alternative remains—ruin!"

Motionlessly, Lucie stood before him, horrified, bewildered at the suspicion which now, at last, dawned within her. Almighty God! what did it mean? Should these words befor her?

She did not remain long in doubt, the stream had once broken its bounds and now nothing more forced it back within its old barriers, but even in this sudden outbreak of a

secret, sternly preserved for many months, there remained somewhat of the curb which the vicinity of the altar and the habit of constant self-control imposed upon the priest. As if firmly rooted, he remained at his place three paces apart from her, and did not even make the slightest attempt to draw nearer.

"I have loved you, Lucie, from the first moment when you flew past me unsuspiciously as a joyous child. What it was that attracted me as with all nature's strength towards you, whose whole being and existence lie so far asunder from mine, I know not, but this love has become my doom. I have fought against it with all a man's strength of will, with the agony of a priest's conscience; it was all in vain! Like a demon this passion clung to every thought, stole into

every dream, and stirred up every fibre of my heart, even if I stood apparently cold and reserved towards those around me. All that a man can do to struggle and resist I have done, but there is a limit even to human strength of will, and mine has now reached its end. I yield!"

He waited in vain for an answer. Lucie had put both hands before her face, the dazzling light which suddenly poured in upon her mental vision struck her with all the painful power of the first ray of sun upon one who has been blind. Beloved by this man! They concerned her, these demon-like depths which disclosed themselves to her, and to her alone! It was the second time in her life that any one had ventured to speak of love to this young girl. Once Count Ottfried had

lain before her upon his knees, and begged her to hear him, and while his words of flattery bewildered her ears, and overwhelmed her childish vanity with triumph, the stirring music rang from out the brightly-illuminated ball-room, where the couples floated past. Here, only the wind rustled amongst the wreaths of the dead, and the never-failing light shone down upon the pair separated for evermore by that spot which usually unites two people for their whole life. one knelt before her here; that tall figure stood erect, and the deep, glowing passion which flowed towards her had nothing in common with the Count's gallantry. almost seemed as if it were akin to hatred. as if every word which came hoarsely and compressedly from his lips, was only forced

from that inward resistance which still rebelled indignantly against the power of nature drawing him towards her. And yet it stirred up her whole soul within its deepest recesses. She felt as though all her past life faded away never to return, and with it the child who, until now, had treated everything like play, turned everything laughingly and jokingly asidé, as if all life were but a sunny meadow, which she could dance along; and what rose before her in its place, so serious, so mysterious, and so solemn, was not the love of which she had dreamed, but it took possession of her whole being with most unaccountable strength. The shadow which that sombre figure had ever cast upon her path, gained form and life; she knew now, too, why she had fled before these eyes, and that the flight had been in vain. Stillness of death reigned in this gloomy building. Benedict left his place slowly and came to her side.

"You are silent!" said he, more calmly but hopelessly. "I knew that my confession could only inspire you with alarm and repugnance, yet I was powerless to resist making it. Perhaps I shall now go with a lighter heart to the decision which awaits me, and to the condemned prisoner one last free word is always granted. I have disturbed your peace, but believe me, Lucie, that which I have borne before it reached this climax is surely worthy of the few tears which this hour costs you, which, perhaps, to-morrow will be already forgotten. Fare you well!"

The weakness he had before exhibited seemed as if about to break forth once more, but the man's whole bitterness was poured out again in his farewell, as he deemed himself misunderstood. He turned away impetuously, and left her alone. But with his departure the spell which had kept the girl motionlessly enthralled, loosed itself; she started forward, and made a movement as if to hasten after him.

"Bruno!"

It was in a tone of imploring, unutterable anguish that the name fell against the walls, a tone such as had never yet come from that childish mouth; but it was too late, the young priest was already outside. She found herself alone in the church's deepening twilight; the lamp above the high altar

swayed more rapidly to and fro, the blast of air blew more strongly, and, as if touched by ghostly hand, one of the wreaths loosed itself from the wall, and fell heavily to the ground. Lucie shuddered.

A strange figure now appeared in the church door, and the next moment a little old man stood at the girl's side.

"If it pleases the Fräulein, I am at her service," began he politely.

Lucie looked at him confusedly. "Who are you?"

- "I am the sacristan! His reverence the Chaplain bade me remain with the young Fräulein, and take her back safely to —!"
- "To N-!" was the low, half choking reply.
 - "To N-?" repeated the old man,

astonished, "why that is where the Chaplain is going now; then he could have done it himself! Well, perhaps he does not think that the path over the 'wild gorge' is fit for such feet as yours; we shall go by the highway of course."

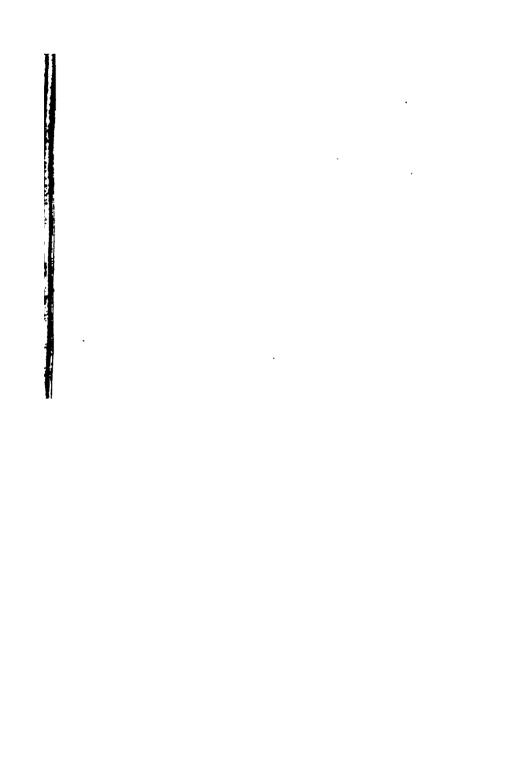
Lucie made no reply, she mechanically followed the man into whose care Benedict had confided her, but she walked at his side as if lost in a dream, and did not hear a word of all that her loquacious companion told her of the mountains, and the autumn and winter up there. He, too, was returning to N—!

Benedict had indeed struck into the same rocky path that Ottfried had traversed before him. He certainly made more rapid progress on this road than could the delicate and uncertain feet of the young Count; after the lapse of a very few minutes the Pilgrim's Chapel lay behind him.

The high mountains' crests had long since wrapped themselves in their cloaks of mist, only now and then the white snow tips gleam forth to be veiled again immediately. The clouds rise from the ravines, drift to and fro, and pile themselves up upon the wanderer's path as though they would frighten him back.

Above the "wild gorge" the aspect became still more threatening, and the dark stormy clouds which ascended slowly on the horizon enveloped the already darkening abyss in even deeper shadows. They hung as gloomily and heavily above those cliffs as if the whole heavens would precipitate themselves into that ravine; and below in the depths the waters hissed and boiled and rushed onwards triumphantly—the longed-for victim has become theirs at last. The ruins of the railing hung down from the bridge, and the waves foamed along over a youthful head which, bleeding and shattered in its fall, had found his grave in their cold embrace.

END OF VOL. II.



• · · . • · ·

. ,

.

. .

